



November 2022

Final Report

**UN joint programming on strengthening
Malaysia's national system on
monitoring & evaluation for the SDGs.**

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Abbreviations

BursaMalaysia	Malaysia Stock Exchange
CSO	Civil society organisation
DoF	Department of Fisheries
DOSM	Department of Statistics
EPU	Economic Planning Unit
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
HIBAS	Household and Income Expenditure Survey
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KDN	Ministry of Home Affairs
KeTSA	Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources
KPKT	Ministry of Housing and Local Government
KPWKM	Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development
KSM	Ministry of Human Resources
MBLS	Malaysian Bureau of Labour Statistics
MDAs	Ministries, departments and agencies
MITI	Ministry of International Trade and Industry
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoH	Ministry of Health
NHIS	National Household Indicators Survey
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PDRM	Royal Malaysia Police
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDSN	Sustainable Development Solutions Network
ST	Energy Commission
SUHAKAM	Human Rights Commission of Malaysia
UNCTAD	UN Conference on Trade and Development
UNEP	UN Environment Programme
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNGC	UN Global Compact
UN-Habitat	UN Human Settlements Programme
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
UNSD	UN Statistics Division
WHO	World Health Organisation

Acknowledgements

For Development Initiatives Bill Anderson has been the lead consultant supported by Sam Wozniak who carried out the research for the custodian case study and by project managers Mary Gaichiri and Sheila Oguda.

National consultants, Azree Pardas and Ameer Azhar from Quantum Catalyst Partners, have provided background intelligence on the political economy of data in Malaysia and have been responsible for engagement with government ministries, coordination with DOSM and all DI's in-country arrangements.

The work would not have been possible without consistent support from DOSM's five SDG clusters who have participated in a series of virtual and in-person meetings. Our collaboration with DOSM has benefitted in particular from the knowledge and experience of our focal point, Puan Azah Hanafi. Her involvement in the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators provides DOSM with a mature framework within which to build on their existing monitoring.

The project also relied on the support of the EPU who ensured that the consultants were given access to ministries and with whom two engaging feedback presentations led to useful discussions on the further advancement of the SDG agenda in Malaysia.

Special thanks to Adam Ling from UNICEF who made this work possible and kept it on track.

Introduction

UNICEF's Malaysia Office (CO) contracted Development Initiatives (DI) to give technical support to the UN's Joint Programming on Strengthening Malaysia's national system on Monitoring & Evaluation for the SDGs. The overall objective of this assignment was to work with the Department of Statistics (DOSM) to explore and facilitate implementation pragmatic solutions for government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) to provide data to populate 34 SDG indicators currently not reported by the Government of Malaysia.

A contract between the CO and DI was finalised in December 2021 and it was agreed that a pre-inception phase of work would be carried out during February 2022 leading to the submission of an Inception Report which proposed a plan of work to take place between March and September 2022 covering:

- Work with DOSM to design, prioritise and facilitate implementation a suite of pragmatic strategies to fill data gaps for thirty-four nominated SDG indicators.
- Engagement with Malaysian government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) to identify sources of administrative data and how data flows between MDAs and DOSM could fill some indicator gaps.
- Engagement with the global custodians of SDG indicators where such contact has not taken place as expected: either to clarify methodologies or to ascertain the provenance of Malaysian data held in the global SDG database that DOSM was not aware of.
- Production of a technical guidance document covering proposed approaches for each of the nominated indicators.
- Preparation of a study on the flow of data through the global custodians to meet DOSM's concerns that it does not have full oversight of SDG monitoring and that there is data in the global SDG database that does not match the data published on national portals.

This final report should be read in conjunction with the accompanying **Technical Report** and the case study on **The role of global custodians in supporting Malaysia's SDG monitoring framework.**

Summary of work

Between February and September, the following work took place.

- During a pre-inception phase desk research was conducted on the initial list of indicators and national consultants, [Quantum Catalyst Partners](#)¹ (QCP), were retained to lead on local administration of the work and MDA engagement.
- An [Inception Report](#)² was submitted in March 2022.
- The lead consultant visited Malaysia to work with DOSM and to plan engagement work with MDAs. A [presentation was made to the EPU](#)³ of initial findings and plans.
- During this mission, as a number of the thirty-four nominated indicators required little or no action, it was agreed to extend the coverage of the work to a total of sixty-five indicators. These were chosen during workshops with each of DOSM's five SDG working groups. Selection was based on the indicators sharing sources or features with the nominated group. Desk research was carried out on both the data and metadata making up these additional 31 indicators.
- [An online dashboard](#)⁴ was created to provide transparent management and a dynamic work environment between DI, QCP, CO and DOSM.
- Between May and July engagement took place with four MDAs⁵ and eight global custodians⁶ and further research was conducted on indicators with complex methodologies. Work was started on a technical document³ which summarises the status and agreed approach for all indicators.
- A second mission took place in July for further consultation with DOSM and to attend a workshop organised by DOSM attended by 21 MDAs. Progress presentations were made to the [DG of DOSM](#)⁷ and to the [EPU](#).⁸
- In July it was agreed with DOSM to remove ten indicators from the consolidated list and add a further six. This left a list of sixty-one indicators under review.
- Following on from the mission a [Progress Report](#)⁹ was submitted in August.

¹ <https://quantumcatalyst.my/>

² https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LrzcNIAe2UWg1NYdbk-f5kJcm8Q_Evgj/view?usp=sharing

³ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FJG4ZfwjMsTQm3T8rDY7BU3T7f880xVM/view?usp=sharing>

⁴ <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1NFqMh6UsqnhprD9bgxG2zPB0-mxEJ7zeUEXQLaX8YMk/edit?usp=sharing>

⁵ KeTSA, KPKT, KSM, MoF

⁶ ILO, UNCTAD, UNEP, UNFCC, UNGC, UN-Habitat, UNICEF, UNSD

⁷ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1e_-enDG8kGx05NTsKS-QvxnMnu0XAdx9/view?usp=sharing

⁸ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1e_-enDG8kGx05NTsKS-QvxnMnu0XAdx9/view?usp=sharing

⁹ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WxEN7T9woNmFVIlfsmOI1DcPqK8j8oy/view?usp=sharing>

- Between May and August research was conducted on the role of global custodians in supporting Malaysia’s SDG monitoring framework. The findings were [presented to the UN Country Team](#)¹⁰ in August and the [case study](#)¹¹ was submitted in October.
- All 61 indicators have been discussed with DOSM’s 5 SDG clusters and courses of action have been agreed upon for each. The [Technical Report](#)¹² summarising the status, key metadata and agreed or recommended approaches for the indicators was submitted in October.

Status of Indicators

Table 1 shows that Malaysia is currently performing better than most countries in its monitoring of the SDGs.

Table 1 - Ranking of countries by number of indicators in the global database in 2019¹³

Rank	Country	No.	Rank	Country	No.	Rank	Country	No.
1	Peru	131	14	Kyrgyzstan	117	33	Sweden	112
2	Thailand	130	17	Indonesia	116	38	Japan	111
3	Colombia	125	17	Kazakhstan	116	42	USA	110
4	Mexico	124	17	Pakistan	116	51	Spain	109
4	Ecuador	124	20	Nepal	115	51	Norway	109
6	Malaysia	122	20	Cambodia	115	51	Australia	109
7	Belarus	121	22	South Africa	114	64	UK	106
7	Costa Rica	121	22	Bulgaria	114	73	Denmark	104
9	Georgia	119	22	Romania	114	73	France	104
10	Serbia	118	22	Rep of Korea	114	73	Viet Nam	104
10	Mongolia	118	22	Argentina	114	84	Germany	103
10	Ukraine	118	27	Egypt	113	91	Singapore	101
10	Zimbabwe	118	27	Uruguay	113	95	Italy	100
14	Philippines	117	27	Turkey	113	95	China	100
14	Armenia	117	27	Honduras	113	107	Canada	98

¹⁰ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1S59JCOKQtZNRdeFDB56ZNzTfx1pYei_/view?usp=sharing

¹¹ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sLb7ot641Aaw4Lj0pCRegBZH-TFjXvAM/view?usp=sharing>

¹² https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Ku2ZH_VRNfcwTvBoctQoRCDMaeQS_X8d/view?usp=share_li

¹³ The table lists the top 30 countries followed by a selection of various countries of interest. The numbers exclude data on Official Development Assistance reported by the OECD which are wrongly assigned to recipient countries, rather than donors. Based on data downloaded from the global SDG database on 22 August 2022

This ranking does not reflect performance in *meeting* the SDGs, only the *monitoring* of the goals. Nevertheless, it is a good reflection of DOSM's efforts to date.

Table 2 lists the current status of the 61 indicators under review. The accompanying [Technical Report](#)¹⁴ provides a more detailed description of each indicator. In summary:

Work is in hand to fully meet 29 indicators and a further 4 partially.

- 9 indicators are already fully available as a result of ongoing DOSM work and two new data sources being identified through engagement with KPKT.
- The design of the 2021 National Household Indicators Survey specifically included questions aimed at filling SDG gaps. The results of the survey are, at time of writing, still being reviewed, but, subject to this validation, up to 16 indicators will be met.
- Final validation of a new disability module in the Labour Force Survey and data on company sustainability from BursaMalaysia will fulfil a further 2 indicators
- Data from PLANMalaysia and KeTSA provides partial fulfilment of 4 indicators.
- Plans for a new time-use survey and adding a module on recruitment costs to the Labour Force Survey will provide 2 more indicators in the medium term.

Ongoing work is required by DOSM/MDAs in order to seek solutions to 22 of the indicators

- DOSM has scheduled ongoing work to develop 8 indicators
- Clarifying feedback from global custodians is outstanding for DOSM to finalise 3 indicators.
- Plans to engage with MDAs to meet 11 indicators have been set in motion but remain incomplete. This work was initiated by the consultants but is now in DOSM's hands.

6 indicators will not, at present be pursued

- Data is not available for 3 indicators and another 3 are deemed not to be relevant to Malaysia's SDG priorities. In both cases the cost of meeting these indicators in the short to medium term is deemed to be prohibitive.

¹⁴ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Ku2ZH_VRNfcwTvBoctQoRCDMaeQS_X8d/view?usp=share_li

Table 2 - Current status of indicators

Solution status	Indicator ¹⁵
Already fully available (9)	5.c.1 - Gender funding
	7.b.1 - Renewable energy
	8.5.1 - Hourly earnings
	*11.6.1 - Municipal solid waste
	12.5.1 - Recycling
	14.6.1 - Illegal fishing (p)
	16.2.1 - Child punishment
	16.10.2 - Access to information
	16.a.1 - Human rights
Will become available (subject to validation) from NHIS results (16)	4.2.1 - Early childhood development
	4.3.1 - Youth/adult education
	5.2.1 - Violence against women
	5.2.2 - Violence against women
	*5.3.1 - Young marriages
	*5.a.1 - Agricultural land ownership
	*5.a.2 - Women's legal rights
	*10.3.1 - Discrimination
	*11.7.2 - Harassment
	*16.1.3 - Violence
	*16.1.4 - Safety
	*16.2.3 - Sexual violence
	*16.3.1 - Reporting of violence
	16.7.2 - Inclusive decision-making
16.9.1 - Birth registration	
16.b.1 - Discrimination	
Partially available (4)	11.1.1 - Slums
	*11.2.1 - Access to public transport
	*11.7.1 - Public space in cities
	15.9.1 - Biodiversity targets

¹⁵ Indicators prefixed with an asterisk were added beyond the initial agreed list of 34 indicators

Solution status	Indicator ¹⁵
Available subject to further validation (2)	8.5.2 - Unemployment
	12.6.1 - Company sustainability
New data collection planned (2)	5.4.1 - Unpaid work
	10.7.1 - Recruitment costs
Ongoing development being undertaken by DOSM (8)	*1.1.1 - Poverty
	1.3.1 - Social protection floors
	1.4.1 - Basic services
	*1.b.1 - Poor spending
	*10.4.2 - Fiscal redistribution
	11.4.1 - Heritage spend
	*16.4.1 - Illicit financial flows
	*16.4.2 - Seizure of arms
Ongoing engagement with custodians (3)	*10.a.1 - LDC zero tariff lines
	*17.5.1 - Investment promotion regimes
	*17.7.1 - Environmental tech funding
Ongoing engagement with MDAs (11)	*2.b.1 - Agricultural export subsidies
	*3.b.3 - Health facility medicines
	8.4.1 - Material footprint
	8.4.2 - Material consumption
	*8.8.2 - Labour rights
	*8.b.1 - Youth employment strategy
	11.3.2 - CSO in urban planning
	12.2.1 - Material footprint
	12.c.1 - Fuel subsidies
	15.2.1 - Forest management
Not available / applicable / relevant (6)	16.10.1 - Violence against journos
	1.4.2 - Land rights
	*11.3.1 - Land consumption
	15.5.1 - Red list index
	*16.3.3 - Dispute resolution
	*13.a.1 - Financial mobilisation
	8.7.1 - Child labour

Ongoing priorities

As evidenced in Table 1 above, DOSM's commitment to SDG monitoring is exemplary and well established. The new 2021 National Household Indicators Survey is testimony to this ongoing work, with data for 16 indicators soon to be released.

DOSM's statisticians are generally focused on technical matters. The production of official statistics involves an uncompromising approach to data quality and statistical calculations. Those SDG indicators that can be monitored through such an approach have already been delivered by DOSM: either through its own data collection or in collaboration with MDAs.

Filling the outstanding gaps, however, will require DOSM to adopt a more robust approach in three, primarily non-technical, areas:

- Strengthening relationships across government
- Improving communications with global custodians
- Prioritising missing indicators

Strengthening relationships across government

Between July and September, the consultants were tasked by DOSM to engage with 8 MDAs.¹⁶ Despite earlier engagements¹⁷, a very successful workshop hosted by DOSM in July in which 21 MDAs participated, introductions through official letters from EPU and DOSM, and repeated email communications, none of these meetings took place.

A number of the ministries gave the impression that they would prefer to deal directly with DOSM rather than through the consultants.¹⁸ This was not, however, the main reason for slow progress. There would appear to be two overriding reasons for this breakdown in good working relationships.

Firstly, DOSM does not currently have the legal or political authority to persuade MDAs to comply with its needs. And secondly, as a direct result of this lack of authority, DOSM staff do not have the confidence to make demands of their MDA counterparts. The fact that consultants have been hired to carry out engagements which DOSM itself should be capable of managing is evidence of this lack of confidence.

¹⁶ KeTSA, KPKT, KPWKM, KSM, MITI, MoH, PDRM, SUHAKAM

¹⁷ Earlier engagements are documented in the Progress Report.

¹⁸ This was expressed explicitly by MoF and implicitly by others.

In October 2020 plans were revealed to revise the 1965 Statistics Act. Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Economy) Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed announced that it was the government's aim to strengthen the availability of national data through giving DOSM a bigger role in the coordination of national statistical information. The Act would make DOSM responsible for assisting, coordinating and controlling the production of statistics for ministries, departments and government agencies.¹⁹

At the same time²⁰ the Cabinet approved the formation of a National Statistics and Data Council to serve as the highest agency in the country with regards to national data and analysis. This met for the first time in January 2022, chaired by the Prime Minister. A key decision taken was “empowering the Statistics Department as a central agency for this coordination and management, through the strengthening and modernising of its statistical services.”²¹

The consultants were informed that the momentum for the revision of the Statistics Act appeared to have been lost, but in the Chief Statistician's submission to the UN Statistical Commission in February 2022²² a 5-year plan for developing Malaysia's national statistical system was announced which includes:

- Appointment of a Chief Data Officer to coordinate information in MDAs under the control of DOSM
- Amendment of the Statistics Act 1965 to empower and give a bigger role to DOSM
- Recognition of DOSM as a Central Agency towards its responsibility in coordination, standardisation, monitoring, and controlling the production of statistics from MDAs

Improving communications with global custodians

From the start of this project, it became clear that there was a disconnect between DOSM and the various international agencies responsible for curating the SDG indicators. This revealed itself through two issues. Firstly, there was a mismatch in data held by DOSM and the data published in the global SDG database. Secondly DOSM was experiencing difficulty clarifying methodologies for some of the more complex indicators.

¹⁹ Statistics Act to be amended to boost DOSM's role in data collection -

<https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/statistics-act-be-amended-boost-dosms-role-data-collection>

²⁰ 9 September 2020. Ibid

²¹ PM chairs National Statistics and Data Council's inaugural meeting -

<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2022/01/27/pm-chairs-national-statistics-and-data-council039s-inaugural-meeting>

²² [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/53rd-session/documents/statements/3\(d\)-Malaysia-24Feb2022.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/53rd-session/documents/statements/3(d)-Malaysia-24Feb2022.pdf)

The consultants have engaged with custodians on DOSM's behalf for a number of reasons.

- To seek clarification on indicator methodology
- To discuss the implications of indicator methodology changing mid-stream
- To seek clarification on discrepancies between national and global data
- To establish the provenance of data in the global database of which DOSM is unaware
- To encourage custodians to inform DOSM of their activities relating to the collection and publication of indicator data

Looking into these problems led the consultants to realise that Malaysia is not alone in dealing with these issues. Further research led to the preparation of a separate study that accompanies this report: *The role of global custodians in supporting Malaysia's SDG monitoring framework*.²³

The overriding finding from this investigation was that the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on the SDGs (IAEG) – of which Malaysia is a member - has agreed a set of best practices with the custodians but which the custodians are failing to honour. The consultants believe it would be beneficial to the work of the IAEG for this study to be shared with them.

DOSM, with support from the UN Country Team, is, however, in a position to proactively remedy many of these issues merely by ensuring that functioning communication channels are in operation between DOSM and the named focal-points responsible for curating each of the indicators. Furthermore, as is the case in dealing confidently with MDAs, DOSM should not need the services of an external consultant to manage engagement on these matters.

Prioritising missing indicators

DOSM has been under a certain amount of pressure, from both the Malaysian government and international agencies, to fill **all** gaps in their monitoring of the SDGs. Some gaps can be met by administrative data that DOSM was not aware of. Some can be partially met by proxies built out of existing data. But a substantial number will only be able to be met by the collection of new data.

²³ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sLb7ot641Aaw4Lj0pCRegBZH-TFjXvAM/view?usp=sharing>

Here the government is faced by the law of diminishing returns. Establishing new surveys and information systems is both a timely and a costly business. The decision-making process to assess the cost-effectiveness of such investments appears to be beyond DOSM's mandate, yet it is DOSM that is best placed to provide the most objective advice on such matters. The consultants have opened discussions and provided examples from other countries to empower DOSM to engage in these decisions.

The pressure that DOSM perceives is thus currently misplaced. The real pressure relates to the performance of government in *meeting* targets²⁴. It could therefore be argued that DOSM's resources are best spent improving the timeliness and accuracy of existing indicators rather than expanding the range of indicators covered.

²⁴ Much of this pressure originates from third-party analysis such as SDSN's Sustainable Development Report that does not use the SDG Global Database as its primary source of data. See <https://www.sdgindex.org/reports/sustainable-development-report-2021/>

Recommendations

The consultants would like to address recommendations in response to two challenges: firstly, how can Malaysia improve its SDG monitoring, and secondly, how can the global custodians better support the national efforts.

Malaysia-based institutions

In respect of DOSM's efforts to improve Malaysia's SDG monitoring:

EPU

- The EPU should proactively strengthen DOSM's political authority in coordinating Malaysia's national statistical system and SDG monitoring framework through ensuring the sustainable success of the new National Statistics and Data Council. It should strengthen DOSM's legal authority through promoting the revision of the 1965 Statistics Act.
- The EPU should encourage MDAs to render all necessary support to DOSM in monitoring SDG progress.
- The EPU should encourage MDAs to explicitly embed relevant SDG indicators into their strategic plans, policies and monitoring frameworks.
- The Government of Malaysia should extend its national SDG programme by embedding the localisation of targets and use of indicators into both state and local governments.

DOSM

- DOSM should adopt a more confident approach in its engagement with MDAs to access all available data required for SDG monitoring.
- DOSM should improve its communications with global custodians to ensure that national SDG data is accurately reflected in the global database.
- DOSM should have the confidence to decide not to pursue the fulfilment of SDG indicators that are expensive to implement and are not priorities for the monitoring of national development plans.

MDAs

- MDAs should, as part of the Malaysian government's commitment to meeting the SDGs, proactively play their full role in ongoing cooperation with DOSM in the provision of data required for SDG monitoring.

UNCT

- The UNCT should, wherever possible, recognise and promote DOSM's authority as the leader of the national statistical system.
- The UNCT should take proactive steps to improve communication between DOSM and global custodians through local country and regional offices.

International institutions

In respect of the findings of the case study on the role of global custodians in supporting Malaysia's SDG monitoring framework:

IAEG

- DOSM should submit the case study to the IAEG and request that its findings are discussed at a future meeting.
- The IAEG should take a firmer stance in ensuring that global custodians follow the group's recommendations and best practices.

Global Custodians

- Custodians should ensure that they maintain open communication channels with NSOs with focal point contact information on both sides being kept up to date.
- Custodians should honour their commitment that all modelled and estimated data is shared with NSOs for validation before being posted in the global database.

UNSD

- In addition to physically hosting the global database, UNSD should take on some responsibility for data quality to ensure that custodians follow the agreed metadata standards when submitting data to the database.

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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