



FOR PARTICIPANTS ONLY

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***Considerations in strengthening national
statistical capacity and readiness for monitoring
the SDGs in SPECA member states***

Session III: Statistical Assessment and Statistical Capacity-building Needs

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Considerations in strengthening national statistical capacity and readiness for monitoring the SDGs in SPECA member states

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I. Introduction

In September 2015, leaders of United Nations member States pledged common action to achieve 17 Sustainable Development Goals with 169 associated targets which are integrated and indivisible¹. For this 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, world leaders declared that “Our Governments have the primary responsibility for follow-up and review, at the national, regional and global levels, in relation to the progress made in implementing the Goals and targets over the coming fifteen years.”² Moreover, follow-up and review will be based on a set of global indicators, complemented by indicators at the regional and national levels which will be developed by member states.

In July 2016, the United Nations Secretary General presented the first overview of the current global situation relative to the 17 Goals of the 2030 Agenda³ to the High-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council. Complementary to this, the global statistical community issued *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2016*⁴, a statistical report based on data available as of May 2016. The report highlighted, through data visuals, the most significant gaps and challenges in meeting the associated targets.

Both reports are based on the global indicator framework developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) and agreed to, as a practical starting point, by the 47th session of the UN Statistical Commission in March 2016⁵.

In the 2030 Development Agenda, statistics development in and of itself is a central component of the means of implementation. It recognizes that the data and statistics requirements for monitoring achievement of the goals present a tremendous challenge to all countries. Leaders of United Nations member states universally recognized that building national statistical capacity is an essential step for fulfilling these requirements. SDG targets 17.18 and 17.19 stipulate national statistical capacity building with the aim of increasing not only availability of statistics at national and subnational levels but also their quality, especially timeliness, as a necessary means of implementation for the entire development agenda.

The present paper aims to provide a basis for further discussion on the following issues at the SPECA Economic Forum:

- How can SPECA together with development partners support the transformation of official statistics for better quality and timely data and statistics for SDG monitoring?

¹ A/RES/70/1 - Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E

² *Ibid.* para 47.

³ E/2016/75- Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. <http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2016/secretary-general-sdg-report-2016--EN.pdf>

⁴ The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2016.

<http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2016/The%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goals%20Report%202016.pdf>

⁵ E/2016/24-E/CN.3/2016/34. Statistical Commission Report on the 47th session. Para 2. Decision 47/101

- How can SPECA support the development and discussion of national voluntary reviews?
- What kind of support can ESCAP extend to SPECA for the above?

Section II looks at the “readiness” of the official statistical systems of SPECA member states to support SDG implementation on the basis of information on current availability of the global SDG indicators sourced from the ESCAP Statistical Database and self-assessments as well as information on characteristics of the statistical system. The state of readiness to provide the requirements for data and statistical services for SDGs implementation directs attention to underlying statistics capacity issues in the SPECA member states which are discussed in Section III. Monitoring progress through the indicators is a component of the broader follow-up and review process of the 2030 Agenda which is presented in Section IV, highlighting the mechanisms at regional and sub-regional levels. The ESCAP framework for statistical capacity building, presented in Section V, takes a holistic approach around which ESCAP can extend support to SPECA member states. The final section identifies key considerations for strengthening statistical capacity for SDGs implementation.

II. Readiness for SDG monitoring in SPECA member states

A. The Global Indicator Framework for Monitoring the SDGs

The global monitoring framework currently consists of 230 indicators. The IAEG-SDGs continues to further develop the indicator set which is yet to be adopted by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. This work is prioritized on the basis of a classification of indicators according to a three tier system, as follows:

- [Tier 1] 81 indicators considered conceptually clear with an established methodology and standards available and related data are regularly produced by countries.
- [Tier 2] 57 indicators also considered conceptually clear with an established methodology and standards available but related data are not regularly produced by countries.
- [Tier 3] 88 indicators for which either there are no established methodology or standards. This tier includes those indicators for which methodology and standards are being tested. It has to be noted that many Tier 3 indicators are not statistical in nature; rather they refer to reporting on agreements or qualitative review of policies related to the targets. An example is indicator 12.1.1 “Number of countries with sustainable consumption and production (SCP) national action plans mainstreamed as a priority or a target into national policies” under Goal 12 Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
- In addition to the three tiers, there are four indicators that fall under multiple tiers, i.e. different components of the indicator are classified into different tiers. All these four indicators require multiple levels of stratification, which poses methodological challenges. For example, in elaboration of indicator 4.5.1- Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as

disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators.⁶

B. Data availability for global indicators in SPECA member States

(i) *National assessments*

Countries, including some SPECA member States have been undertaking ‘mapping’ exercises; i.e., mapping available national statistics and indicators to the global SDG indicators in order to assess the current availability of data for the global SDG indicators. Most of these mapping exercises serve the purpose of stock-taking or initial data gaps analysis for SDG implementation at the national level and thus do not necessarily assess the overall capacity to report on the global monitoring framework. For example,

- According to the initial data gaps analysis that the State Statistics Committee of Azerbaijan conducted, there are currently 70 SDG indicators available across 14 SDGs in this country.
- For Kazakhstan, the initial findings point to 74 SDG indicators being currently available with raw data available for estimating 32 additional ones.^{7,8}

The criteria used for determining a ‘match’ in most national-to-global indicator mapping exercises are not uniform across such studies. For instance, it is not clear whether ‘availability’ is defined in terms of whether the nationally produced statistics follow international standards or strictly match the metadata defining the global indicator. In these cases, international comparability of the nationally available indicators, a feature needed for producing aggregates pertaining to regional groupings, cannot be established.

(ii) *Gap analysis based on international data sources*

A data gaps analysis of country data on the global monitoring indicators available in the ESCAP Statistical Database⁹ provides an indicative picture of the state of readiness of SPECA member States to provide statistics that are internationally comparable for monitoring the SDGs.

The ESCAP Statistical Database is comprised of data compiled from data of international organizations to ensure comparability of the data that it aggregates and publishes. Hence, non-availability a given indicator in this database does not necessarily mean that indicator

⁶ Tier Classifications for Global SDG Indicators, 21 September 2016. Available at: <http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/meetings/iaeg-sdgs-meeting-04/Tier%20Classification%20of%20SDG%20Indicators%20Updated%2023-09-16.pdf>

⁷ ESCAP, 2nd Sub-regional Workshop on Data and Statistics for SDGs, Almaty, 26-30 September. For documents, please see <http://www.unescap.org/events/second-sub-regional-workshop-data-and-statistics-sustainable-development-goals-sdgs-central>

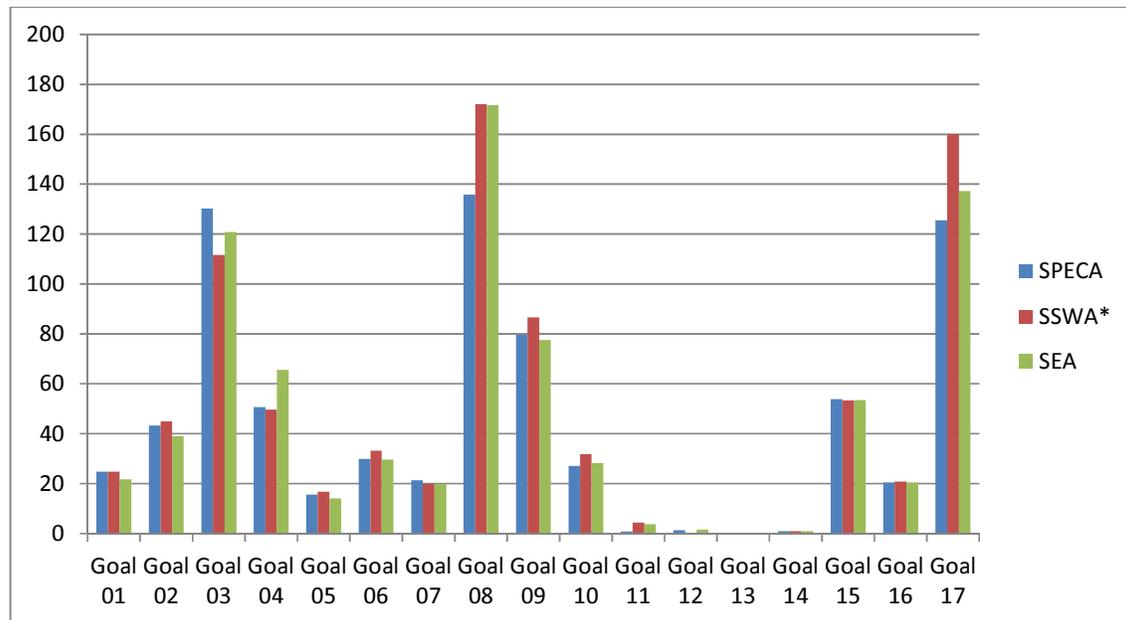
⁸ Details of these mapping exercises, such as the criteria used for assessing whether a given indicator is available or not, are not published.

⁹ The ESCAP Statistical Database is updated continuously based on international data sources, including the SDG indicators global database. For further information on the ESCAP Statistical Database, the sources of data and the methods used for compilation please visit <http://www.unescap.org/stat/data/>

values or data needed to produce the indicator are not available at the national level. The current analysis thus provides some but not full insight on national statistical capacity to produce and/or disseminate statistics.

Figure 1 below shows the average number of data points per country since 2005¹⁰ under each SDG for SPECA, South and Southwest Asia (SSWA*) (except Afghanistan which is included in the SPECA group) and Southeast Asian countries.

Figure 1. Availability of official SDG indicators by goal and selected ESCAP groupings (2005-2016)¹¹



*SSWA does not include Afghanistan, as the latter is included as SPECA.

Based on the above figure, SPECA has significantly fewer data points to monitor progress towards the achievement of Goals 8, 11 and 17 on decent work and economic growth, sustainable cities and partnerships for the goals, respectively, compared to South and Southwest Asia (except Afghanistan) (SSWA*) and Southeast Asian (SEA) countries. Goals 3, 7 and 15 on health, energy and life on land, on the other hand, are the areas where SPECA has more data availability per country and hence allows further analysis of data availability for the SDGs. In addition, to be able to cover the economic dimension more closely SDG 8 where there is a large number of indicators overall (but SPECA countries appear to have significantly less data available compared to SSWA* and SEA) are examined.

Some observations from a closer look at availability of indicators at the national level for SPECA member states include:

¹⁰ For this analysis, the ten-year period 2005 - 2015 allows for identifying existence of regular surveys which should happen more than once over 10 years.

¹¹ The indicators under SDG 13, Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, are categorized uniquely as Tiers 2 or 3, which means that there are no indicators currently available under this Goal.

For Goal 3- *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.*

- Associated with Goal 3 are 9 targets and 4 means of implementation and 26 indicators in the global monitoring framework. Table 1 gives the number of data points available between 2005 and 2015 for the relevant SPECA countries and the latest year where there are data for SDG target 3.4.
- Based on the 2 indicators that are selected under target 3.4 (By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being), we see that there are variations in terms of the availability and periodicity of data among SPECA member States pointing to the use of various data sources at the national level.

Table 1. Number of data points and the latest year of data for selected SDG indicators on health

SDG indicator (Target 3.4)	Azerbaijan	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan
Mortality rate attributed to cardiovascular disease	1 (2007)	8 (2012)	9 (2013)	1 (2013)	1 (2005)
Mortality rate attributed to chronic respiratory disease	1 (2007)	8 (2012)	9 (2013)	1 (2013)	1 (2005)

For Goal 7- *Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all*

- Associated with Goal 7 are 3 targets and 2 means of implementation and 6 indicators in the global monitoring framework. Table 2 provides the data availability for the indicators that are currently measurable and where there are data available between 2005 and 2015 for the relevant SPECA countries. The 2 indicators under the 2 means of implementation are categorized as tier III indicators.
- All SPECA countries have the same number of data points available with the same latest year except Afghanistan, which has no data available for renewable energy production and total primary energy supply.

Table 2. Number of data points and the latest year of data for selected SDG indicators on life on land

SDG indicator 3 (Targets 1, 2 and 3)	Afghanistan	Azerbaijan	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan
Access to electricity (SE4All)	2 (2012)	2 (2012)	1 (2012)	1 (2012)	1 (2012)	1 (2012)	1 (2012)
Access to non-solid fuel (SE4All)	4 (2014)	4 (2014)	4 (2014)	4 (2014)	4 (2014)	4 (2014)	4 (2014)

Renewable energy production, total		9 (2013)	9 (2013)	9 (2013)	9 (2013)	9 (2013)	9 (2013)
Total primary energy supply (TPES)		9 (2013)	9 (2013)	9 (2013)	9 (2013)	9 (2013)	9 (2013)

For Goal 15-Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

- Associated with Goal 15 are 9 targets and 3 means of implementation and 14 indicators in the global monitoring framework. Table 3 provides the data availability for the indicators under target 1.
- All SPECA countries have the same number of data points available with the same latest year.

Table 3. Number of data points and the latest year of data for selected SDG indicators on life on land (SDG 15)

SDG indicator 15 (Target 1)	Afghanistan	Azerbaijan	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan
Forest area as percentage of land area	9 (2013)	9 (2013)	9 (2013)	9 (2013)	9 (2013)	9 (2013)	9 (2013)
Proportion of important sites for fresh water biodiversity	3 (2016)	3 (2016)	3 (2016)	3 (2016)	3 (2016)	3 (2016)	3 (2016)
Proportion of important sites for terrestrial biodiversity	3 (2016)	3 (2016)	3 (2016)	3 (2016)	3 (2016)	3 (2016)	3 (2016)

- According to a review of the global monitoring framework by ESCAP using the Core Set of Economic Statistics¹² as the benchmark, 97 of the SDG indicators require economic statistics, mostly Gross Domestic Product. Table 4 focuses on selected employment-related indicators where there is data available in SPECA member States.
- For all indicators that are covered in Table 4, except for youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) and child labour related indicators, the number of data

¹² For more information please see E/ESCAP/CST(2)/4. Available at: [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/ESCAP/CST\(2\)/4&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/ESCAP/CST(2)/4&Lang=E)

points and the latest year for which data are available are the same across SPECA countries. In the case of child labour-related indicators, the various dates are due to the fact that survey dates differ from country to country. The data sources for these indicators are surveys that are supported by the ILO (Child labour surveys) and UNICEF (Multi Indicator Cluster Surveys).

Table 4. Number of data points and the latest year of data for selected SDG indicators on decent work and economic growth (SDG 8)

SDG indicator 8 (Targets 1-7, 9-10, 8a)	Afghanistan	Azerbaijan	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan
Average annual GDP per capita (2005 US dollars) growth rate	10 (2014)	10 (2014)	10 (2014)	10 (2014)	10 (2014)	10 (2014)	10 (2014)
Growth rate of GDP per employed person	12 (2016)	12 (2016)	12 (2016)	12 (2016)	12 (2016)	12 (2016)	12 (2016)
Unemployment rate, (male/female/total)	12 (2016)	12 (2016)	12 (2016)	12 (2016)	12 (2016)	12 (2016)	12 (2016)
NEET rates, (male/female/total)				6 (2014)			
Percentage of children 5-14 years old involved in child labour (male/female)	1 (2011)	1 (2005)	1 (2006)		1 (2005)		
Percentage of children 5-14 years old involved in child labour (total)	1 (2011)	1 (2005)	1 (2006)	1 (2014)	1 (2005)		

III. Statistical capacity development priorities for SPECA member states

With global development agendas, national statistical systems invariably see an increased demand for official statistics including new measurement areas. In the case of the Millennium Development Goals, the emphasis was on social statistics which were not readily available in many developing countries. This led to a series of internationally designed and supported surveys such as the Multi Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) implemented by various development partners. In the case of environment-related indicators, often times, international modelling was the answer to the lack of national data. With the adoption of the 2030 Development Agenda, the requirements of official statistical systems as well as of other providers of data increased exponentially.

The SDG monitoring architecture, interlinkages between goals and targets and the need for disaggregated data and a variety of data sources mean that national statistical systems need to be in a position to provide more processed and analytical products; changing their role from data collectors and disseminators to information providers.

Key challenges and priorities for statistical capacity strengthening for SPECA member States are outlined below.

A. Capacity for statistical coordination

The monitoring of the SDGs requires the mobilization of all parts of a national statistical system producing official statistics as well as cooperation from private data producers. For the production and dissemination of official statistics that are in line with the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (FPOS)¹³ and conform to international quality assurance frameworks, coordination between the user community (policy makers, academia, non-governmental organizations, private sector and media, etc.) and producers of official statistics is crucial. In the case of SDG monitoring, both the producer and the user communities to be engaged have become larger and the data collections and flows underlying the monitoring are complex especially given the interlinkages across indicators.

This coordination function is ideally vested in the national statistical office (NSO)¹⁴. The capacity of the NSOs to coordinate with other producers and with the users of official statistics depends on a number of factors. First and foremost, the existence of a statistical law in the country clearly delineating the national statistical office as the coordinator of the national statistical system and the corresponding legal acts and memoranda of understanding among the concerned agencies facilitating that coordination is necessary.

¹³ The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics were endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 68/261 of 29 January 2014. Please see <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/dnss/gp/FP-NEW-e.pdf>

¹⁴ In SPECA member states, "National Statistical Office" is known by different names. Refer to Table 5.

In all SPECA member States, there is a legal framework but in most cases the legislations need to be reviewed and revised in order to ensure that they are in line with the FPOS and that NSOs can work with an enlarged group of stakeholders, including with private data producers.¹⁵

Furthermore, NSOs hold various statuses in the government hierarchy which reflect different levels of clout and also facility to coordinate with other agencies. Table 5 gives an overview of the standing of NSOs in their respective governments.

Table 5. Status of SPECA national statistical offices in government hierarchy

SPECA member States	Status of the NSO in government hierarchy
Afghanistan	<i>Central Statistics Organisation</i> reports to the Government through the National Statistics Committee chaired by the Vice-President
Azerbaijan	<i>State Statistical Committee</i> of the Republic of Azerbaijan is a member of the Cabinet of Ministers
Kazakhstan	<i>Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Statistics</i> reports to the Ministry of Economy
Kyrgyz Republic	<i>National Statistical Committee</i> of the Kyrgyz Republic reports to the President
Tajikistan	<i>Statistical Agency</i> under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan is a member of the Cabinet of Ministers
Turkmenistan	<i>State Statistics Committee</i> of the Republic of Turkmenistan reports to the President
Uzbekistan	State Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan reports to the President

In terms of official statistics producer-user coordination, the existence of functioning Statistical Councils, often headed by the national statistical office (by the Vice President in the case of Afghanistan), is indispensable. In all SPECA member States there is a Statistical Council bringing together users and producers of official statistics.

SDG monitoring requirements have led to institutional restructuring in some national statistical offices. For instance, in the Kyrgyz Republic and Azerbaijan a new department on sustainable development statistics was established within the national statistical office in order to coordinate the production and dissemination of statistics for monitoring the 2030 Development Agenda as well as conducting indicator selection and methodological work. However, not all member states have as yet a clear strategy for coordinating for SDG monitoring.

¹⁵ The Conference of the European Statisticians endorsed in its 64th session in 2016 the Generic Law on Official Statistics. Please see http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/2016/mtg/ECE_CES_2016_8-1601555E.pdf

Capacity for strategic planning for statistics development

A national strategy for the development of statistics (NSDS) or a statistical master plan giving the development priorities (or the inputs) for official statistics together with a work programme (annual and/or multi-annual) giving the statistical outputs for the entire national statistical system are building blocks of coordination of official statistics producers. All SPECA member States have a work programme at least on an annual basis; an NSDS is in place for all except for Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The latter and Afghanistan are the only SPECA member States that have not had a Global Assessment of their national statistical systems, which is a diagnostic study used for the development of strategic documents such as the NSDS and for the improvement of official statistics production, processing and dissemination through institutional and technical changes.¹⁶

The adaptation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the prioritization of the SDGs in the countries will necessarily involve a mapping of the global goals to the national development plans. Ideally, national strategies for the development of statistics or statistical master plans would ensure that the indicators required for monitoring the national policy framework, including the SDGs, will be produced. Such strategies also function as a coordination tool for not only the national statistical system but also the development partners involved in statistics development.

B. Capacity to provide statistical guidance to national mechanisms on SDG implementation and monitoring

Many SPECA countries have established national mechanisms for the implementation and the monitoring of SDGs. In the Kyrgyz Republic, the initial Coordinating Committee for the implementation of SDGs was recently transformed into the Coordinating Committee for adaptation, implementation and monitoring of SDGs. The latter is currently in the process of preparing a draft plan of organizational activities on the adaptation of SDGs.

In the case of Uzbekistan, the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan passed a decree (No 111-F) on 15 February 2016 for the establishment of a coordinating council for the development and the implementation of measures to adapt SDGs. The same decree also established six thematic working groups for economic welfare, social protection, health, education, environment and effective management.

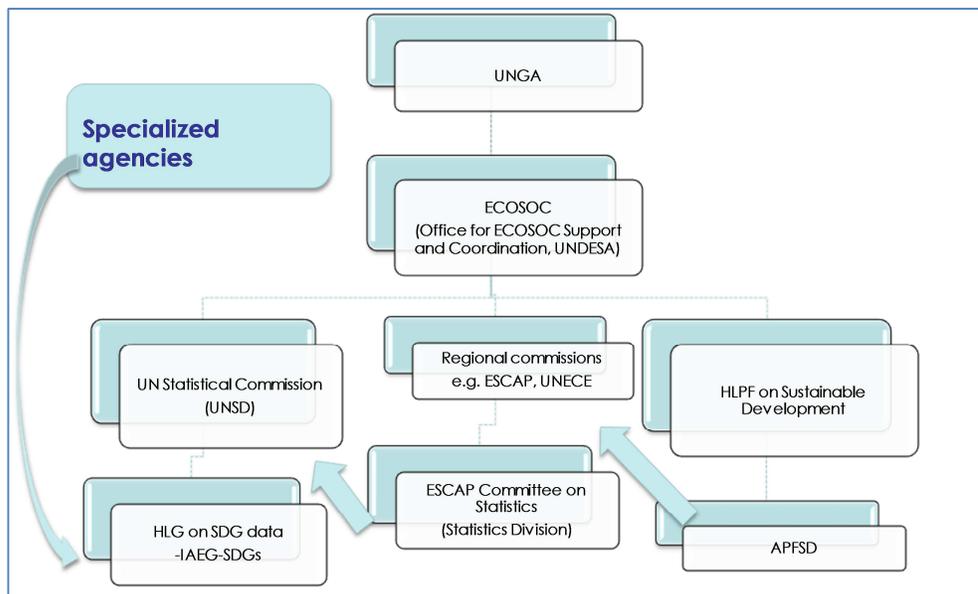
In SPECA countries or other North and Central Asia countries, NSOs play a key role in these coordination mechanisms, not least because data and statistics are the starting point for any level of decision making.

¹⁶ For all Global Assessment reports to date refer to <http://www.unece.org/statcoop/ga.html>

IV. Understanding the regional and subregional mechanisms for follow-up and review

Diagram below presents the landscape of the intergovernmental fora related to SDG implementation and monitoring, including the follow-up and review process. The Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) and High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) are the regional and global forums, respectively, for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The ESCAP Committee on Statistics and the United Nations Statistical Commission together with the IAEG-SDGs and the HLG support the monitoring of the SDGs through capacity building and standards setting.

Diagram. Intergovernmental landscape for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development



The first group of national voluntary reviews were submitted to the High-level Political Forum that took place in July 2016 in New York.¹⁷ As of November 2016, 30 countries have volunteered to participate in the 2017 reviews. While there are no strict guidelines for the preparation of follow-up and review reports, the principles of follow-up and review processes are outlined in the General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/1 with clear emphasis on the voluntary and country-led nature of these reports. Two of these principles relate directly to data and statistics are the following:

“(g) They (*follow-up and review processes*) will be rigorous and based on evidence, informed by country-led evaluations and data which is high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migration

¹⁷ For more information please visit <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>

status, disability and geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.

(h) They will require enhanced capacity-building support for developing countries, including the strengthening of national data systems and evaluation programmes, particularly in African countries, least developed countries, small-island developing States, landlocked developing countries and middle-income countries.”

Given this undeniable importance of data and statistics for follow-up and review, the Asia-Pacific statistical community engages in the APFSD discussions as a development data regional forum where users and producers can have a dialogue on the data and statistics needs for SDG monitoring. The strategic decisions guiding normative and technical work are taken by the ESCAP Committee on Statistics.

“The main benefits of regional review activities must be felt at the level of the region and countries. Regional reviews — peer learning and assessments of progress and policies — will allow for discussions on overall trends, gaps, lessons learned, best practices, and issues specific to the region — whether they relate to means of implementation, the thematic review or others — and boost regional cooperation and partnerships”.¹⁸ Regional and subregional follow-up and review can contribute to the global HLPF without having a formal reporting line.

Member states are encouraged to identify the most appropriate regional or sub-regional mechanisms that they would like to engage in for follow-up and review. These decisions also depend on the shared priorities of the members of a given mechanism. For instance, based on the outcomes of the regional meeting “Monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals: Meeting to identify Asia-Pacific regional and sub-regional priorities”¹⁹ organized by ESCAP in September 2015, Central Asian²⁰ representatives covering SPECA member countries identified the following priority issues (in order of SDGs that they relate to):

Food security (SDG 2)
Health (SDG 3)
Education (SDG 4)
Gender (SDG 5)
Water (SDG 6)
Energy (SDG 7)
Employment (SDG 8)
Climate change (SDG 13)
Biodiversity (SDG 15)
Governance (SDG16)

¹⁸ *Critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level*. Report of the Secretary General to the General Assembly at its 70th session, A/70/684.

¹⁹ For all documents of this meeting please see <http://www.unescap.org/events/monitoring-sustainable-development-goals-meeting-identify-asia-pacific-regional-and-sub>

²⁰ The regional composition of the IAEG-SDGs is different from the ESCAP subregions.

V. Regional Collaboration for Statistics Capacity Development in Asia-Pacific

A. ESCAP statistical capacity development framework

The Asia-Pacific statistical community has been working towards mobilizing collective efforts for the establishment and the maintenance of “well-resourced and well-functioning national statistical systems” guided by the two strategic goals endorsed at the second session of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics in 2010:

- 1) Ensure all countries in the region by 2020 have the capacity to produce an agreed basic range of population, economic, social and environment statistics; and
- 2) Create a more adaptive and cost-effective information management environment for national statistical offices through stronger cooperation.

ESCAP’s capacity building framework for statistics targets institutional strengthening of national statistical systems and the improvement of core sectoral statistics in line with the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (FPOS) and internationally agreed statistical standards.²¹

(i) Institutional strengthening: Striving towards components and features of a modern national statistical system

Table 6 depicts the components of a modern national statistical system—a system whereby collectively, institutions comprising the system determine, generate and provide information that are “fit for purpose”.

The first five institutional capacity components in Table 6 refer to the elements of a well-coordinated national statistical system, which is founded upon first and foremost a sound statistical law, regular strategic planning that takes into account resource requirements for the statistical outputs desired, political support and commitment for national statistical systems, coordination among official statistics providers as well as regular user-producer engagement.

Components 6 and 7 refer to the statistical business process, i.e. how data are collected, processed and disseminated whereas components 9 and 10 give the ensemble of the infrastructure that a modern national statistical system relies on to produce and disseminate official statistics. Component 8 addresses the human factor, i.e. the skills set that is required for operating a modern national statistical systems with all its components.

Table 6. Elements of a modern national statistical system

Institutional capacity component	Desired Features
1. Legal framework	Existence and implementation of a modern statistical law that applies the FPOS

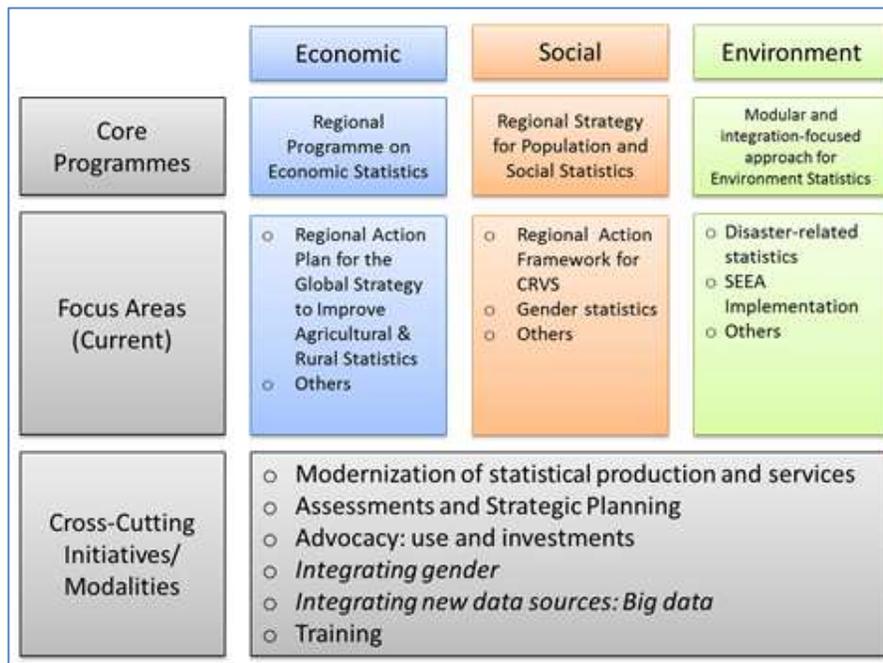
²¹ The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics were endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 68/261 of 29 January 2014. Please see <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/dnss/gp/FP-NEW-e.pdf>

2. Strategic planning	Strategic planning is not solely output-based but incorporates policies and resource requirements and is linked with national development plans
3. Advocacy for the improvement of national statistical systems	Advocacy is intended to galvanize political and financial support to implement a national statistical plan comprising all statistical domains and all producers of official statistics
4. Coordination among agencies of the NSS	Coordination among national agencies involved in the production and dissemination of official statistics is assured through the development and implementation of national plans as well as regional coordination in provision of tools and support
5. Engagement between data users and data producers	Mechanisms to engage users and producers, such as user-producer dialogues are in place
6. Modernization of statistical organizations	Organizations of the NSS use international tools and standards for mapping and rationalizing business processes and building modern IT and metadata infrastructures
7. Quality assurance and dissemination policies	Quality assurance and dissemination policies are put in place
8. Human resources and skills	Subject-matter expertise and technical skills, human resources policies, managerial/leadership, and communication related skills
9. Statistical infrastructure	Statistical infrastructure, including methods and practices, IT, metadata repositories
10. Data sources	Ability to draw on many data sources, from statistical collections, administrative registers and new (non-traditional) sources; data sources are chosen based on quality including timeliness, and cost

(ii) *Domain-specific initiatives—building capacity to produce core statistics*

The domain-specific statistics development in Asia-Pacific is focused on building national capabilities to produce and disseminate core statistics. Figure 2 presents an overview of the ongoing initiatives in the region for developing economic, social and environment statistics. In line with the decision of the Committee on Statistics at its fourth session, all regional initiatives have been undergoing a review in terms of how they respond to the statistical requirements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs.

Figure 2. Statistics Development Initiatives under the ESCAP Committee on Statistics



In the area of economic statistics, the region has designed and agreed on a “Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific”²². The “Core Set of Economic Statistics”, endorsed by the ESCAP Commission²³ in 2011, functions as a shared reference for cooperation and sets out the ambition level for the Regional Programme and an “Implementation Plan for the Regional Programme” was developed over three years of intense work by countries and development partners²⁴. The expected outcome of the Regional Programme is that the national statistical systems in the region have the capacity to produce and disseminate, in line with the international standards, the Core Set of Economic Statistics by 2020.

The ESCAP component of the Regional Programme focuses on the improvement of business statistics and national accounts. Two distinguishing features of ESCAP’s approach to implementing the Programme are its focus on: (i) institutional strengthening through system-wide peer reviews providing diagnostics and (ii) improving quality of economic statistics through national studies.

SPECA countries have been especially active in conducting national studies. The Kyrgyz Republic is piloting a survey on improving coverage of individual entrepreneurs with a view

²² Please see “E/ESCAP/CST(2)/5, Proposed regional programme for the improvement of economic statistics in Asia and the Pacific”, 25 October 2010. Available at:

[http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/ESCAP/CST\(2\)/5&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/ESCAP/CST(2)/5&Lang=E)

²³ Please see “Resolution 67/10 A Core Set of Economic Statistics to Guide the Improvement of Basic Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific”, 25 May 2011. Available at: http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Resolution_67_10_ENG.pdf

²⁴ Please see “E/ESCAP/CST(2)/4, Proposed core set of economic statistics for Asia and the Pacific”, 7 October 2010.

Available at: [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/ESCAP/CST\(2\)/4&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/ESCAP/CST(2)/4&Lang=E); “E/ESCAP/CST(3)/CRP.1, Implementation plan for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific”, 14 November 2012. Available at: <http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/pre-ods/CST3-CRPIE.pdf>

to improving its macroeconomic indicators with ESCAP support. Tajikistan's study focuses on the computation of trade margins which is also indispensable for the improvement of national accounts. Both of these studies will be presented at a high-level panel on improved economic statistics for SDG monitoring as part of the fifth session of the Committee on Statistics, in December 2016.

B. A Collective Vision and a Framework for Action for Advancing Official Statistics for 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The Asia-Pacific statistical community, including SPECA member states, recognizes the need for a regional response to the requirements of SDG implementation, beyond the 'business-as-usual' approach. A Collective Vision and a Framework for Action for Advancing Official Statistics for 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will be discussed at the fifth session of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics for endorsement in December 2016.

Box 1. What is the Collective Vision for Advancing Official Statistics for the 2030 Development Agenda for Sustainable Development?

Taking on the challenge of monitoring the SDGs in SPECA member States as in all developing national statistical systems requires a more holistic approach to transforming official statistics business processes to establish an integrated statistical architecture with the supporting legal and institutional reforms.

In Asia-Pacific, under the guidance of the Bureau of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics, national and international statisticians and statistics development partners are crafting a framework for *collective action* that seeks to accelerate a transformation of national statistical systems. The statistical community *envisions* the organizations, processes, and people comprising the system as enabled and empowered to lead development of and to deliver innovative, trusted and timely products and services for the evolving statistical requirements of Agenda 2030.

Collective actions would add value to ongoing and prospective national actions to hasten transformation of the relevant building blocks of the national statistical system in the form and substance called for by the vision. While building on existing commitments to statistics development at national, sub-regional, regional and global levels, these will serve as springboards for creating resources, designing activities and delivery mechanisms to attain the vision. Actions will be organised and focused around the following areas:

- Engaging users and investing in statistics
- Assuring quality and instilling trust in statistics
- Integrated statistics for integrated analysis
- Modernizing statistical business processes
- Having requisite skills set

*All official documents for the fifth session are available at <http://www.unescap.org/events/committee-statistics-fifth-session>

VI. Conclusions and Way Forward

The ESCAP secretariat has a central role in coordinating follow-up and review at the regional level as well as providing support to the member States in both the implementation of sustainable development policies and supporting the monitoring of the SDGs.

Based on the above overview, national statistical systems of SPECA member States have a good basis to begin SDG monitoring. The challenges of SPECA countries are more on increasing data coverage, including for required levels of disaggregation, ensuring quality of the data and statistics for SDG monitoring as well as responding to the frequent data needs.

None of the SPECA member States prepared national voluntary review reports in 2016; none have volunteered for the 2017 round but these numbers may increase in 2018. The potential role of SPECA in supporting peer-to-peer exchanges, sharing of best practices and assessing progress towards shared targets has not yet been fully examined.

Prioritization and coordinated implementation of identified capacity building thrusts between ESCAP and the UNECE may be facilitated through the SPECA Thematic Working Group on Statistics with these discussions guided and driven by the collective vision and framework for action.
