

PROPOSAL FOR A REGIONAL MDG DATABASE

Note prepared by the UNECE secretariat

BACKGROUND

1. In October 2006, the Bureau reviewed a proposal for a Joint regional initiative on “Improved national evidence-based policy-making in CIS and SEE countries for achieving and monitoring MDGs”. The proposal was submitted by UNECE in collaboration with the Regional Offices of UNDP and UNICEF. The proposal included two components: one related to strengthening the capacity of the countries to produce MDG-relevant statistics, and another one related to the development of a regional MDG database. The Bureau approved the first component but stated that further understanding was needed before the Bureau could agree to endorse a project for developing an MDG database.
2. After the Bureau meeting in 2006, requests continued to be addressed to the UNECE Statistical Division to develop a regional database on MDGs. The continued interest to the regional database was expressed by the UNECE member countries through the Executive Committee of the Economic Commission for Europe (the highest UNECE inter-governmental body), and the regional UN partners (UNDP and UNICEF).
3. In 2007 UNECE, UNDP and UNICEF launched the Regional MDG Info, a joint product where data available in the UNSD MDG database and other regional databases (such as the UNECE gender statistics database and the Transmonee database) were assembled. Although the product provides a regional repository of data for the MDG standard indicators, the demand for an MDG database, which has a broader scope and is more relevant for the region, remains.
4. The objective of the current note is to ask the Bureau to reconsider the development of a regional MDG database.

WHY IS A REGIONAL MDG DATABASE NEEDED?

5. In the Millennium Declaration, the millennium development goals, or MDGs, stipulate quantitative reductions in the various dimensions of human poverty – ranging from hunger, disease and illiteracy to gender discrimination and environmental degradation. These reductions are to be achieved over a 15-year period, between 1990 and 2015. The targets set in the MDGs were agreed unanimously by 189 countries in 2000 and since they have become the centre of the national, regional and international development agenda.

6. The implementation of the MDGs can be monitored in quantitative terms and much of the attention given to the MDGs comes from the power of quantification. For a regular monitoring of MDGs at world level, there is a framework of 48 indicators. Based on these 48 indicators, the Secretary General produces an annual report on the status of implementation of MDGs at global level. The UN Statistics Division (UNSD) also maintains a website with country data on the 48 indicators provided by other specialized organizations¹. The website covers all UN member States including countries from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the South Eastern European (SEE) Region.

7. The framework developed at global level to monitor MDGs is mainly designed for the global monitoring and it does not fully meet the needs of the CIS and SEE countries. The quantitative targets fixed at the global level for each MDG do not always fit the situation faced by the SEE and CIS countries². The MDGs and their related targets and indicators have been adapted in many SEE and CIS countries in order to make them more relevant to national needs³ and to bring them closer to the European targets which are a reference point in many CIS and SEE countries. The same countries are also experiencing growing inequality and different population groups are at different stages in achieving the MDGs. Therefore, monitoring MDGs at national level is not sufficient and indicators used to analyse trends should better reveal these differences.

8. In the CIS and SEE countries, considering the monitoring of the MDGs only in the context of the global indicator framework would risk the undermining of the overall MDGs process since the global indicators do not address the problems that CIS and SEE countries face in achieving the MDGs. Only a regional approach to MDGs monitoring would be able to take into consideration these specific needs.

9. The development of a new regional MDG database is intended to respond to the needs of developing a regional approach to the MDGs. The database will make available a repository of data where countries of the region can better compare their efforts to reach the MDGs. It will also assist regional and international organizations to better monitor the MDGs at regional level.

10. The regional database will include all MDG-related data existing in international/regional sources plus regionally-specific indicators and regionally-specific disaggregation of existing indicators. Compared to the existing regional and international databases, the regional MDG data base will provide new value added making available:

- new indicators that are considered relevant for the CIS and SEE countries;

¹ http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mi/mi_goals.asp

² For example, the global target related to poverty that aims to halve the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day is hardly applicable in the CIS and SEE countries where the conditions needed for survival are above one dollar a day (even if calculated on the Purchasing Power Parity - PPP) and should take into consideration issues related to, for example, heating. Poverty monitoring indicators in the region would be more relevant if based on a national poverty line where national circumstances for survival are more properly taken in consideration.

³ For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, MDG 1 was reformulated as: "to reduce general poverty to the EU level average in 2015" and in The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as "Reduction of poverty and social exclusion". In Armenia, an additional goal was introduced on ensuring food security; while in Ukraine MDG 6 on HIV/AIDS was reformulated in "Reducing and slowing down the spread of HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis".

- disaggregation of indicators not available at global level (sex, ethnicity, urban/rural, sub-regions);
- indicators from national sources not available at global level.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE DATABASE

11. The database will be a joint product of UNECE, the regional offices of UNDP and UNICEF and UNFPA. The content of the database in terms of new indicators, disaggregations and sources will be identified in consultation with national statistical offices and the other UN partners.

12. The joint database will build on the successful experience of inter-agency collaboration between UNECE and the regional offices of UNDP and UNICEF in the field of MDG statistics. This collaboration started in 2005 when a task force on MDG statistics was established. Recently, UNFPA has also joined the initiative and together the four agencies are offering to UN Country Teams a package of services to support countries to build or improve monitoring systems and strengthen national statistical capacity to monitoring MDGs.

13. The regional database will be hosted by the UNECE Statistical Division incorporating the new collection and dissemination of MDG data into the existing production and dissemination infrastructure.

SOURCES OF DATA

14. The data already available at regional and international level will be fully utilized. Only data not available in other existing international/regional repositories of data will be collected through national publications/databases or through a direct contact with national statistical offices. The new request for data will be incorporated into the existing requests that UNECE sends to countries to maintain the current databases.

RESOURCES

15. The new MDG indicators will not make use of existing resources and therefore ongoing programmes will not be affected. UNECE and the other partners are actively seeking extra resources. UNECE management is committed to securing the extra resources needed to develop and maintain a new MDG regional database. A series of proposals have been submitted to different UN initiatives.

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