

Expert Meeting on Statistics for SDGs

31 March - 1 April 2022, Geneva

Session 1: Communication - progress measurement

Progressing Progress: Open doors with Open SDGs

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Abstract

User Research shows that users need a clear view of progress so that they can understand if we (the UK) are achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The UK Office for National Statistics in collaboration with Open SDG¹ have subsequently developed progress reporting features and tested them with users of our data site². This paper showcases the Open SDG prototypes and presents the results of our initial user research to illustrate some of the complexities of these as communication tools.

I. INTRODUCTION TO USER RESEARCH FOR OPEN SDG

1. The aim of Open SDG is to provide a free reusable platform for managing and publishing data and statistics related to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Globally, Open SDG is being used by over 30 countries, regions, and cities. Open SDG now has the functionality for countries adopting the platform to report progress.

2. The aim of our user research is to help us learn what people need from our data site, and to design a service that works well based on the findings. It's critical for us, not just to ensure that we are providing the best service we possibly can but also to meet relevant Government Service Standards³.

3. We want to provide a website that has purpose and is easy to use by everybody. To achieve this, we want to understand more about who uses this site and what they need from it.

4. Our approach to user research is user centred and iterative, we take what we learned from the user research and develop the design.

II. USER PERSONAS

5. One of the most useful outputs from our user research was establishing user personas. A useful persona helps us to understand users' needs, experiences, behaviours, and goals. The user personas⁴ identified for the UK SDGs Data Site are shown in Figure 1.

¹ <https://open-sdg.org/>

² <https://sdgdata.gov.uk/>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/service-standard>

⁴ <https://sdgdata.gov.uk/user-personas/>

Figure 1
The user personas identified for the UK SDGs Data Site

| Primary Personas | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| Concerned Citizen “Tell me what the goals are and what is being done about them” | Connected Influencer “Give me a tool that will support my ambitions and give me a louder voice” | Fact Gatherer “I just need to quickly see what progress is being made and check the facts” | Involved Analyst “I just want the data so I can do my own thing with it” |
| Secondary Personas | | | |
| Data Supplier “Tell me when you need it and where it is. I want to help and be involved” | | Data Detective “Let me efficiently update the SDG platform with appropriate data” | |
| Master Builder “I want to rapidly build my own solution” | | International Users “I need country data to produce regional and global aggregates” | |

6. The primary persona types visit and use the website. These users can move between these personas depending on activity.

7. We have also identified a number of secondary personas: whilst these users visit the website, they are not considered users of the website. Their needs lie in the back end and need to be considered when performing any front-end development work, for example, a data supplier may want their data presented in a certain way.

III. USER RESEARCH ON PROGRESS

8. Preliminary user research identified a need for the website to report on progress, towards the SDGs; a quarter of original user needs, related to progress. To explore this further, we carried out:

- **Discovery study** - whereby we investigated the participants role, their interest and conceptual understandings of progress and the subsequent measurement of it, including exploring reactions to prototypes.
- **Progress Minimum Viable Product (MVP) usability testing** - a participative user-based evaluation of the data site, where the user is probed to explain their expectations and problems in completing activities to determine any potential usability issues that prevent completion of key ‘progress’ user tasks.
- **Terminology study** - labelling and terminology to help us consider what users understand by them.
- **Preference testing** - measuring user opinion around what an icon means, and how it ‘feels’ to them. It involves showing a number of different potential images / icons that could be used as the SDG ‘progress indicators’ and asking participants to highlight the one they prefer.

9. Overall, over 50 participants have been involved in activities related to user research on progress; we have spoken to a variety of personas across all these research pieces.

IV. PROGRESS REPORTING PROTOTYPES

10. The progress reporting functionality currently available within Open SDG and subsequently the prototypes explored, included target lines and progress status’ on both the goals and indicator pages as shown in figure 2. Figure 3 shows an example of the progress status labels.

Figure 2
Progress reporting prototypes

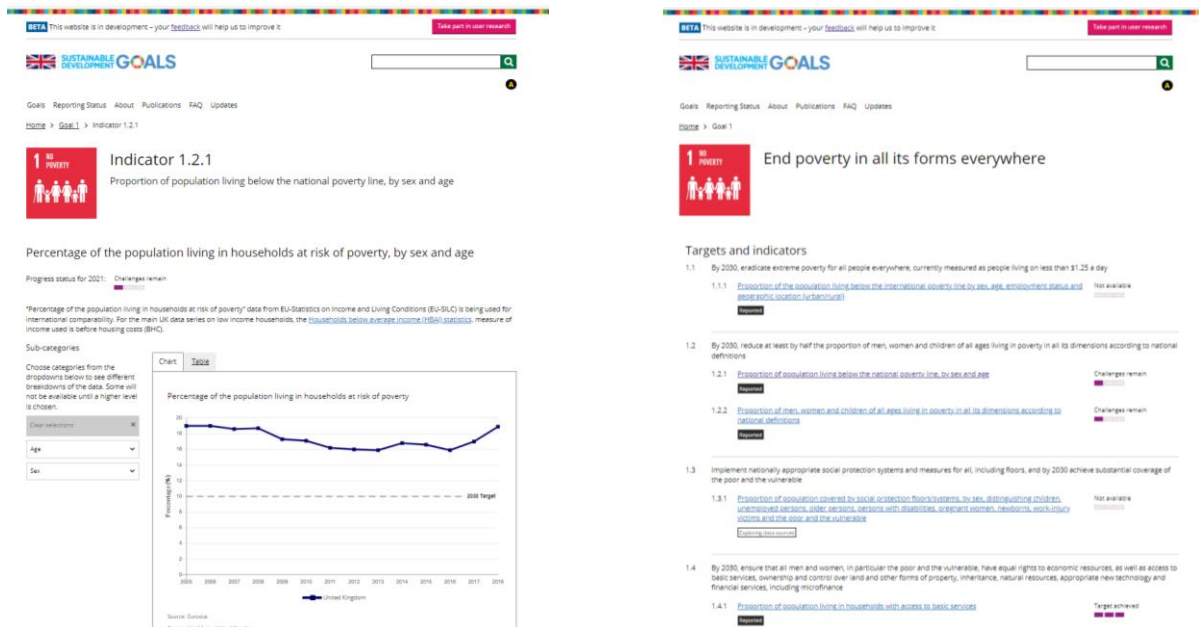
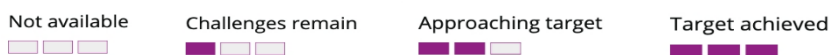


Figure 3
Progress status labels



V. USER RESEARCH FINDINGS ON PROGRESS

11. The undertaking of this research has further highlighted, the impact that a visitors persona type has on their needs, understanding, and expectations when visiting the site. Indicating the importance of using persona insights to make informed decisions. For example, participant’s observation and understanding of the progress statuses was inconclusive, with the labels and images being observed by some users and persona types, whilst others did not notice them at all. However, all participants observed and correctly interpreted the target line displayed on the indicator page graph.

12. In addition, the findings can be characterised by the desire for context surrounding the data; for example, comparisons to a baseline, a timepoint or to other similar economic countries.

13. There was also a want for more detail, either highlighting the interlinkages and connectivity between indicators and understanding the relevance to the UK or a need to interrogate the data.

14. On the flip side, other users and persona types wanted easy to follow summaries; a quick overview of how the UK is doing overall against the SDGs, an overview of progress statuses for all indicators within a given goal or a summary of key information contained within an indicator page.

15. The overarching message from the research supports the sessions ethos that progress measurement is a balancing act between facilitating communication and being mindful of the risk of losing any relevant information when trying to communicate complexity with single index results and easy to read graphics. Those who participated in our research illustrated that it’s not just about showing graphics of progress but the message that sits alongside it, whether there has been any change and if so, what are the reasons for that change?

VI. NEXT STEPS

16. To further improve the user experience, we plan to continue our user research and usability testing for the lifetime of our data site. This will include, continuing to test approaches to measuring progress on the SDGs, such as validating the proposed ‘reporting progress’ designs and continually assessing any potential usability issues.
