

ECA Forum for statistical Development

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Hand-out

**Improving statistical capacity
and MDG literacy
at the country level**

A joint UNDG effort

Drafted by
Poverty Group
UNDP

1. Introduction

The main purpose of MDG monitoring is to use empirical evidence to highlight agreed priorities, to inform the public and policy-makers on progress, and to trigger action to meet time-bound targets. If widely shared and publicised, such data will help build an active constituency for the MDGs within the country and abroad.

Statistics on human development have improved considerably in recent years – wider coverage, better quality, more timely. We can now analyse and display disaggregated data by rural/urban location, by gender and by socio-economic status. While the situation is far from perfect, we cannot overlook the tremendous progress made. The challenge is increasingly shifting from data collection to managing the growing amount of information on human development and the MDGs for public and policy advocacy.

At the country level, there are many players involved in the production of information through administrative reporting systems, surveys and censuses. The management and accessibility of such data needs to be improved. The ultimate challenge is to enhance the statistical literacy of users by increasing the capacity in government, CSOs and other stakeholders.

MDG country reports include a table 'Capacity at a Glance' that summarise existing capacities for different aspects of the monitoring process. Its purpose is to help national authorities and interested partners to prioritise operational support. Too many countries remain trapped in a vicious circle of low demand for and poor supply of data. Traditionally, external support for statistics has focused on the supply side of data, while little attention has been paid to generating public demand for such data.

2. Project objectives

Enhancing the statistical literacy among the stakeholders is an area where UNDG members are intensifying their operational support. Users and producers of data must jointly ensure that data production is tailored to the needs of the policy-makers and those advocating for policy alternatives. In an effort to help operationalise the MDGs at the country level, UNDG has developed a project to support countries in the following three areas:

1. Make data more accessible. Enhance the capacity of national statistical offices to maintain a central repository of data for MDG reporting and on the impact of national development strategies. Technical assistance will be provided to (i) gather existing data that are currently used (or could be) for monitoring progress; (ii) set up a central repository of data, using DevInfo or any preferred software; (iii) train database managers to maintain the system; and (iv) facilitate discussion among stakeholders to ensure the database meets user needs.

2. Enhance statistical capacity and literacy. Training will be provided to make better use of MDG data and indicators to improve evidence-based management of development policy. An initial course will train the trainers and will provide seed funding to train a further 100-200 users in each country. Training will

cover (i) MDGs and indicators for monitoring development progress; (ii) sources, methods and meta data; (iii) accessing the data through DevInfo; and (iv) basic statistical analysis for improving advocacy, participatory decision-making and advocacy.

3. Support evidence-based advocacy. Data analysis will allow public advocates to monitor progress and tailor numerical targets to fit country specific priorities. Familiarity with the indicators and data will allow advocates to choose appropriate ones and to use them for reporting on intermediate and disaggregated targets.

3. Co-ordinated approach

The project has been developed under the umbrella of the UNDG initiatives to strengthen MDG tracking at the country level. It will complement other initiatives such as UNICEF's roll-out of DevInfo as a corporate software package; efforts of the UN Statistics Division to build capacity with national partners; a UNDG project on MDG training for UNCTs and STATCAP of the World Bank. The project will help implement the 6-point 'Marrakech action plan' for statistics (round table of February 2004). The objectives of the project are supported by the conclusions of the PARIS21 task team for statistical capacity building – a co-operative effort of the WB, EU and UNDP.

4. DevInfo

DevInfo is a user-friendly software developed by UNICEF for monitoring key social and economic indicators. It is a general-purpose package that is not restricted to monitoring only MDG indicators. ChildInfo, the previous version, has been used extensively and DevInfo is already in great demand. The project will encourage the use of the software to monitor indicators identified for the monitoring of national development plans, including indicators set out within the PRSP monitoring and evaluation systems. This extended use of DevInfo will help consolidate national and international PRS monitoring data.

5. Support structure

A project manager will establish a system of technical support for all DevInfo users and will channel suggestions for software improvements for future updates. At the country level, technical support will be provided through a DevInfo focal point and through a global helpdesk, which will provide both IT and statistical support. Technical support will continue to be provided by the UN Statistics Division.

UNICEF will provide comprehensive training for the use of DevInfo to a core group of people in government, the UN country team and individual agencies. The training will cover practical training to extract data for MDG reporting in the form of tables, maps and graphs, as well as data management in the collection, maintenance and updating of information.

6. Coverage and budget

Following the official launch of DevInfo this April, UNDG will seek to establish the software as a tool for MDG monitoring in UN country teams and national statistical offices over the next 2 years.

It is planned to roll out the project in 30 countries over the next 12 months – including at least 10 African countries. Country selection will be based on need and capacity, as well as on demonstrated interest expressed in their willingness to invest in better statistics.

The cost of implementing the project is estimated at about \$250,000 per country. MTF resources are available to cover about 20 countries; leaving a funding gap of about \$0.75 million for implementing the project in the other 10 countries over the next 12 months. The WB is considering funding some of the country efforts.

UNICEF has invested \$3 million in developing and rolling out DevInfo. It is seeking some \$2.5 million to ensure that the software and related training is made available in the largest number of countries that are interested in using it.