Examining data needs -- perspectives and assessments

Peter Harper
Acting Australian Statistician
Australian Bureau of Statistics
Introduction


• This presentation offers some perspectives and assessments on the data aspects of these reports.
Statisticians and policy-makers need to work in partnership

- You can’t manage what you can’t measure
- Constructive, early engagement between official statisticians and policy-makers is critical
- Official statistics provide the quality and integrity necessary to underpin measurement in the post-2015 world
- A universal post-2015 agenda is crucial
Roles – policy makers and statisticians

Policy-makers

Statisticians

Goals ➔ Targets ➔ Indicators ➔ Data sets

Roles – policy makers and statisticians

Policy-makers

Statisticians

Goals ➔ Targets ➔ Indicators ➔ Data sets
Choosing **SMART** indicators

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**ttributable
- **R**elevant
- **T**imely

Official statisticians can offer assistance on all these dimensions
Importance of datasets and standards

• Indicators derived from well-constructed datasets will be of far greater value
  – Coherent
  – Consistent
  – Comparable
  – Able to be disaggregated

• Use of international frameworks and classifications is fundamental
  – Welcome support for SEEA in HLP
  – However, new developments will be needed, particularly in social and governance areas
The state of statistics

- Four dimensions of sustainable development
- The targets in the HLP and SDSN reports can be mapped to each dimension statistically:
  - Economic statistics – GOLD
  - Social statistics – SILVER
  - Environment statistics – BRONZE
  - Governance statistics – TIN
- Significant work would be required to provide the full-range of statistics in the HLP and SDSN reports, even for countries with well-developed statistical systems
A quick assessment of the HLP report for Australia

- 54 ‘illustrative’ targets
  - Category A – Doable – 11 targets (eg decrease the maternal mortality ratio)
  - Category B – Doable with a bit of effort – 18 targets (eg improve soil quality, reduce soil erosion and combat desertification)
  - Category C – A fair way off – 25 targets (eg increase sustainability in government procurements)

The illustrative targets proposed by the HLP report are extremely ambitious from a statistical perspective

The SDSN report is similarly ambitious
A data revolution

• Strongly supported

• BUT
  – Must involve official statisticians and be led by the United Nations Statistical Commission (Rio +20 para 38 provides a mandate)
  – Will need resources
  – Will require significantly enhanced capability
  – Will not occur instantly – implications for baselines
  – Needs to be supported by investment in the development of concepts, measurement frameworks and standards
  – Will require focussed efforts
  – Needs to be aligned with national circumstances and requirements
  – Must be coordinated across development partners
Big data – a silver bullet?

• Big data offers enormous potential for increasing statistical information for relatively small costs

• However big data is often uncertain, of varying accuracy, biased, ‘dirty’ and unstructured

• Big data needs to be ‘tamed’ to make it fit for purpose from a statistical perspective

• This requires investments in technology and methodology

• National statistical offices are well-placed to unlock the statistical value of big data and make it accessible for policy makers
Frameworks for measuring progress and sustainability

- Official statisticians have extensive experience in developing frameworks for measuring progress and sustainability, both at the national and international level
  - Eg EU2020 target/indicator setting, OECD green growth and better life initiatives, UNECE/OECD/Eurostat framework to measure sustainable development, ABS Measures of Australia’s Progress
- These frameworks also have relevance from a policy as well as statistical perspective and policy makers should tap into this expertise as they consider the conceptual frameworks to underpin the post 2015 development agenda
- It is disappointing to see that this expertise was not recognised in either the HLP or SDSN reports
Statistics as a development target?

• Without high quality statistics, development cannot be measured, monitored and managed

• More generally, high quality official statistics are a critical component of effective governance, which itself is recognised as an aspect of development

• Should there be a development target relating to an effective official statistical systems?
  
  – The measurement of a country’s population is vital to the measurement of sustainability, so there should be a special focus on universal and effective civil registration and vital statistics systems which are the essential underpinnings of population measurement
The last word

- Effective measurement will be a critical underpinning of the assessment of progress in the post-2015 world
- This will only occur if there is a strong partnership between policy-makers and official statisticians
  - The focus will be on indicators, but targets and datasets also require attention
- The recognition of the importance of data in both the HLP and SDSN reports is welcome, but we are early stages
  - Significant attention is needed to ensure that statistics, particularly in developing countries, can meet the requirements of the post 2015 world
- Official statisticians at both the national and international level are ready and keen to work with policy-makers to achieve an effective partnership