

The Role of Regional Governments in the Monitoring of SDGs

*Reflections from nrg4SD around the
global indicators framework*

On September 2015, the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was approved, containing 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. The SDGs cover a range of themes that aim to balance the economic, social and environmental dimensions in order to achieve sustainable development at all levels. With a special focus on the subnational level, there is a huge potential for the contribution and engagement of regional governments.

Although nearly two years have already passed after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, a lot still needs to be defined, for example when it comes to the global mechanisms of monitoring and the indicators. In order to enable the monitoring of the implementation of the SDGs, the UN established the UN Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IEAG-SDGs). Particularly building on the works of the UN Statistical Commission, the [IAEG-SDGs has met over four sessions – and an upcoming one to take place from 28 to 31 March 2017, in Ottawa, Canada](#) -, as to reach Member-States agreement on an indicator framework for the monitoring of the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development at the global level, and to support their use.

At the same time, we now witness a proliferation of different collaborative initiatives and actions towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Nevertheless, we still lack a substantial global coordination and integration of these efforts at all levels, as to ensure synergies, avoid duplications and establish a joint process to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

In this sense, nrg4SD concentrates its efforts in (i) ensuring the recognition and engagement of regions in the ongoing international discussions, while (ii) providing a collaborative platform to collect, disseminate and support the efforts of regional governments in achieving the SDGs. All of this, taking into account the different circumstances and competences that regional governments have worldwide and the key role that they may play in the implementation of the SGDs.

Global List of Indicators

After several rounds of negotiations in the IAEG-SDGs, the provisional list of 230 global indicators to support monitoring of all SDGs has been set according to the follow distribution:

Tier 1: Indicator conceptually clear, established methodology and standards available and data regularly produced by countries

Tier 2: Indicator conceptually clear, established methodology and standards available but data are not regularly produced by countries

Tier 3: Indicator for which there are no established methodology and standards or methodology/standards are being developed/tested.

As of the last update on 21 December 2016: The updated tier classification contains 83 Tier I indicators, 59 Tier II indicators and 83 Tier III indicators. In addition to these, there are 5

indicators that have multiple tiers (different components of the indicator are classified into different tiers).

The full list of indicators according to each tier may be found at [this link](#).

Therefore, the upcoming meeting of the IAEG-SDGs envisages to update the tier system, discuss the role of UN agencies and other experts in regards to the follow-up of each indicator, and especially to redefine those on tier III.

Already in the adopted document that has put in place the SDGs, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, the chapter on Follow-up and Review brought significant mentions to the importance of conducting review at the subnational level:

*77. We commit to fully engage in conducting regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the **subnational**, national, regional and global levels. We will draw as far as possible on the existing network of follow-up and review institutions and mechanisms.*

*79. We also encourage Member States to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and **subnational** levels which are country-led and country driven. Such reviews should draw on contributions from indigenous peoples, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders, in line with national circumstances, policies and priorities. National parliaments as well as other institutions can also support these processes.¹*

Nevertheless, up to this moment, the participation of local and regional governments in this process is very limited, although the [Global Task Force of Local and Regional Governments](#) has provided inputs, especially concerning the indicators for SDG 11 on cities. In any case, during the meetings of the IAEG-SDGs there were many references to the importance of pursuing monitoring at the subnational level, particularly towards contributing to the urged disaggregation of data.

Increased participation of regional governments in this process would be fundamental, especially because, together with national governments, many states, regions and provinces have a historical experience with indicators, collecting and analyzing data for many decades. To remind some of the existing indicators at the subnational, we suggest the fruitful discussions that were held by the [Communitas Coalition](#) a couple years ago, and including a presentation from nrg4SD with examples of indicators from regional governments.

Monitoring by Regional Governments

In regards to the monitoring of the SDGs, it is important to emphasize a specific element of data disaggregation that is sometimes overlooked. In addition to having detailed information disaggregated by sectors, it would be important that information is made available disaggregated by the territories, cities and geographical areas. That would enable us to

¹ For the full document *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, please access <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

identify and target persisting inequalities within countries, as it is expected from the 2030 Agenda (for example as mentioned in SDG 10). To this capacity, we refer as **territorial disaggregation**, which could support better decision-making at all levels and enable tailored-cut action to tackle the specific circumstances and obstacles of different communities, cities and territories.

Hence, it becomes clear that subnational governments can play an important role to the widely urged **Data Revolution**. With that in mind, nrg4SD recommends three main elements to be considered by subnational governments in the monitoring of the SDGs:

- 1- First, **to define the adequate architecture for monitoring**, which should antecede the decision of the specific indicators to be used for the SDGs. For example, which of existing or new institutions would collect data? How to communicate data in a way that is easy to understand? How the data should be analyzed? How to integrate subnational data from different sources? Establishing this framework should be step one, but unfortunately many subnational governments still need to go through this complex process.
- 2- The second recommendation is to produce **georeferenced data**, which allows the integration of different layers of subnational information and statistics. This should be supported by geospatial tools, which are usually very expensive and require a high-level of expertise not accessible by most of the governments at the subnational level. So it would be interesting to collaborate with national governments and international organizations to ensure access to these tools, as well as capacity-building activities to ensure they are used correctly.
- 3- The third and final recommendation is to consider and make use of **innovative indicators**, especially those being discussed by the IAEG-SDGs. Traditionally and at the international level, the indicators used, as GDP, are limited and do not portray the interconnected nature of the SDGs. Therefore, subnational governments, supported by expert organizations, should make use of indicators as the Resource efficiency, the Well-being index or the OECD Better Life Index, that combines multiple elements for a more comprehensive analysis.

Although a great work is being carried at the global level to define indicators, those will be understood as the global set, while countries will still be open to adopt those that seems most adequate to their particular realities and circumstances. Likewise, the ongoing efforts of regional governments should not be excluded. As different monitoring processes are already in practice at the subnational level, these should rather consider how to be improved and further adapted to fulfill the role of monitoring the SDGs.

Regional Governments Statistical Offices

Moreover, it is relevant to highlight concrete good examples of how regions work with data. Particularly, it is important to recall that states, regions and provinces increasingly have their own statistical offices, institutes and organizations, to prepare and make available territorial disaggregated data. These institutes compile relevant information from different sources,

including from the national level, serving as an important complementary and accessible source. Therefore, subnational data could help fine-tuning indicators and improving national data accuracy.

In the case of the government of Catalonia, in Spain, the IDESCAT (Catalan Statistics Institute) provides a very comprehensive set of data on many topics and areas relevant for the SDGs. It counts with an online portal to access data by sectors, and also by the municipalities of the Catalan territory. The Institute is widely known to the local and international communities, and is especially consulted by universities and researchers.

A similar organization is the SEADE Foundation in the State of São Paulo, in Brazil. The foundation belongs to the state government, and brings together representatives from different sectors, including from the national ministry. Also with an online portal, SEADE produces interesting analysis of socioeconomic and demographic data from the state of São Paulo. During the MDGs experience, this foundation produced annual monitoring reports, based on specific indicators that had been set for the region.

Therefore, the existing, and potentially new, statistics institutions of subnational governments should be involved in the planning and monitoring of national efforts around the SDGs. For example, it should be encouraged that these portals now include a dedicate section for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Furthermore, common metrics and indicators should be fostered by the national level, as to enable comparison and the integration of data collected.

Besides, and similarly to national governments, regions already have innumerable strategies and actions to promote Sustainable Development. In this regard, the SDGs are not understood as a new agenda, in terms that governments will seek links with already ongoing actions. For example, the government of Flanders, in Belgium, and nrg4SD President for the North, has a very comprehensive Sustainable Development strategy, called “Vision 2050”. The strategy can be considered the main mechanism to pursue the 2030 Agenda in the Flemish territory. It counts with a governance system that gathers all relevant Flemish Ministries and thematic departments, in respect to the integrated nature of Sustainable Development. On top of that, the Flemish Strategy already includes indicators, which will be particularly useful for monitoring their progress on the SDGs.

The example of Flanders is an especially interesting case of vertical integration. The representatives of the three regional communities that compose Belgium are directly included in the national delegation responsible for the follow-up and review of the SDGs. In 2017, Belgium will be one of the countries carrying a National Voluntary Review to be presented at the meeting of the UN High-level Political Forum (HLPF) in July. For the Belgian report, the government of Flanders is one of the co-authors for the national report. In this regard, the regional government is preparing a subnational report, assessing their efforts in the areas of the SDGs, which will then feed into and compose the national one.

The way ahead for monitoring SDGs

The SDGs provides us the opportunity to finally achieve a data revolution. This is the moment we could integrate subnational data from different parts, including citizen-science and grassroots communities’ data. Monitoring within countries will be required to ensure no one

will be left behind, and especially the most vulnerable. Nevertheless, we still lack coordination, integration and capacity-building as to ensure all concerned entities will have the means to contribute to this common goal.

At the global level, comparability among countries will be important, especially if we want to pursue an integrated monitoring of multiple agendas. The comprehensive nature of the SDGs should encourage a simultaneous review of the Climate Change, the New Urban agenda and others, and hopefully the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) could be the moment to carry on this complex task.

Multi-level coordination and decentralization will be fundamental to ensure efficient data collection and analysis at the subnational level. It is crucial we provide the necessary technical and financial resources, as well as the legal and constitutional conditions and competences to support local and regional governments achieve their full potential in the monitoring of the 2030 Agenda. Of course, these must then be aligned and contribute to shape the national process, thus acknowledging the key complementary role of subnational governments to produce territorially disaggregated data.

At the UN level, subnational governments need additional opportunities to access UN agencies projects and global events. Especially at the HLPF, the progress of subnational governments should be further discussed, as to input and improve national and global follow-up and review.

A lot is being done at the subnational level, nrg4SD, the ORU-Fogar and other associations of local and regional governments should facilitate exchanges, peer-review and capacity-building for governments at the subnational level, to help and improve the implementation this process.

Finally, we invite you to know more about nrg4SD and its activities around the implementation of the SDGs. Together with key partners, nrg4SD is carrying multiple assessments on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in regional governments. Based on those, we would like to work on introductory conceptual elements and recommendations on how regions should pursue implementation and monitoring of the SDGs.