

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

REPORT

**EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON DATA AND INDICATORS TO MONITOR
PROGRESS TOWARDS MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT
GOALS IN THE ESCWA REGION
BEIRUT, 9-13 FEBRUARY 2004**

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) jointly organized the Expert Group Meeting on Data and Indicators to Monitor Progress Towards Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the ESCWA Region in collaboration with the Central Administration of Statistics (CAS) in Lebanon and the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics (AITRS) in Iraq. The meeting was held at United Nations House, Beirut from 9 to 13 February 2004.

Discussions focused on the following topics: (a) strengthening national capacities for the production of timely, accurate, reliable, valid and comparable MDG-related statistics and indicators and preparation of national MDG reports with a view to benchmark years; (b) reviewing concepts, definitions and measurement techniques pertaining to MDG statistics and indicators; (c) mechanisms to ensure consistency among national, regional and global databases; (d) coordination and cooperation between central statistical offices and other national producers of statistics, central statistical offices and United Nations lead agencies and among such lead agencies.

The meeting concluded with the adoption of a list of recommendations to be considered by Arab countries, national statistical offices and United Nations lead agencies involved in the implementation of the MDG framework. These recommendations emphasized: (a) the importance of national ownership of the process leading to the preparation of national MDG reports; (b) the importance of producing timely, accurate, reliable, valid and comparable MDG statistics and indicators, including improvements to national household survey programmes and utilization of the appropriate proxy indicators or estimations as required; (c) the need for United Nations lead agencies to provide technical assistance for the purpose of strengthening the statistical capacities of Arab countries and better coordinate their efforts in this regard.

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Introduction

1. The Expert Group Meeting on Data and Indicators to Monitor Progress Towards Millenium Development Goals in the ESCWA Region was organized jointly by ESCWA and UNSD and hosted jointly by ESCWA, the Central Administration for Statistics in Lebanon and the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics in Iraq. The meeting was held at United Nations House, Beirut, from 9 to 13 February 2004. The objective of the meeting was to improve the understanding of national statisticians and analysts of MDGs and strengthen national capacities for the production of statistics and indicators to monitor progress towards the achievement of MDGs.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

2. Participants agreed to a list of recommendations to be considered by Arab countries, national statistical offices and concerned United Nations agencies in order to facilitate the process of national implementation and reporting on MDGs.

A. RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENTS

3. The following recommendations were made to governments:

(a) Arab countries should establish a mechanism that would ensure data consistency at the national level and report new and updated MDG data, as well as all other statistics and indicators, to ESCWA, UNSD and competent lead agencies on a regular basis in order to ensure data consistency at the regional and global levels;

(b) Arab countries that have not prepared, or have prepared but not published, country progress reports on MDGs should exert every effort to ensure that such reports are prepared and published as soon as possible, taking into account the 2005 benchmark year. Special attention should be given to enhancing national ownership and ensuring that the processes leading to the MDG report are inclusive;

(c) Arab countries should consider the establishment of comprehensive national household income and expenditure surveys in their household survey programme on a regular basis, oriented to the measurement of hunger and poverty, with more frequent coverage using smaller surveys of short-term trends in principal aggregates. Average household income and expenditures statistics derived from household surveys should be systematically compared with the same series in national accounts and research should be undertaken in order to analyse and resolve differences. Those countries that have already conducted national household income and expenditure surveys could add food consumption analysis in order to enhance food security assessment and establish monitoring strategies. Arab countries should also consider the inclusion of information and communication technology (ICT) measurement in national household surveys;

(d) Arab countries could consider implementation of the multi-cluster indicators survey planned for 2005 (MICS3) for the purpose of generating data on a number of MDGs;

(e) Arab countries must review and improve the concepts, definitions, classifications and methodologies underlying labour force surveys in order to ensure that such surveys comply with international standards and capture the full extent of the contribution of women to the labour market and, in particular, their participation in the informal sector as this accounts for a large proportion of their work. Arab countries are strongly encouraged to consult the technical report published by UNSD and the International Labour Organization (ILO) entitled *Collection of Economic Characteristics in Population Censuses* (ST/ESA/STAT/119);

(f) Arab countries are strongly encouraged to coordinate with the United Nations Population Division (UNPD) and provide demographic inputs in order to enable UNPD to produce accurate population projections with national consensus;

(g) In the event that data for an MDG indicator are unavailable during the preparation of country reports, Arab countries are strongly encouraged to select a proxy indicator that relates directly to the target and goal for the MDG indicator being substituted or, if possible, provide an estimate.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS TO CENTRAL STATISTICAL OFFICES

4. The following recommendations were made to central statistical offices:

(a) Central statistical offices of Arab countries must be engaged in the preparation of country progress reports on MDGs and serve as the focal point for all cooperation in the preparation of MDG statistics and indicators. As such, central statistical offices should integrate the collection and compilation of MDG indicators into their work plans and promote reliability, data quality, methodological transparency and ease of access to data among all national statistical sources;

(b) Central statistical offices are strongly encouraged to coordinate work efforts with the various ministries in order to enhance the quality of statistics and indicators in different areas, such as health, education and labour, as well as ensure the consistency of data at the national level;

(c) Central statistical offices and concerned ministries should adhere to the standards for data collection and calculation methodologies for related indicators set by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization (WHO) in the preparation of MDG data and indicators.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONCERNED UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES

5. The following recommendations were made to concerned United Nations agencies:

(a) United Nations agencies in the region should coordinate their efforts in order to produce a comprehensive MDG report that covers all Arab countries and addresses major development challenges as reflected in national MDG reports and disaggregated data. The lead role in this regard could be assumed by ESCWA and UNDP;

(b) Concerned United Nations agencies are urged to make provisions for the inclusion of new indicators pertaining to ICTs and the labour force and to ensure that all indicators in the MDG framework are gender-sensitive, starting from 2006;

(c) In order to facilitate the adoption of international standards and methodologies, FAO, UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO should provide central statistical offices and related ministries with the appropriate manuals for data collection and analysis.

II. MAIN TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

A. MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS: INTERNATIONAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL REPORTING

6. A representative of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and a representative of ESCWA Secretariat presented papers on global and regional reporting on MDGs, respectively. A representative of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) then presented a paper on regional reporting and dissemination.

7. The following points were raised during the discussion:

(a) Lack of consistency between national and regional or global databases;

- (b) Inconsistencies in data from different national sources such as central statistical offices and ministries;
- (c) Anticipated costs of achieving MDGs by 2015;
- (d) Proliferation of regional reports by different bodies such as ESCWA, League of Arab States and UNDP;
- (e) Misunderstanding of concepts, definitions and methodologies for the calculation of particular MDG indicators;
- (f) Use of proxy indicators and appropriate estimations in cases where data are unavailable;
- (g) Importance of adherence to United Nations Development Group (UNDG) guidelines for reporting on MDGs;
- (h) National ownership of the process leading to the preparation of national MDG reports;
- (i) Technical capacity building for monitoring MDGs and enhancement of statistical literacy among data users.

8. Representatives of UNDP, Palestine, Jordan and Egypt made presentations on national reporting on MDGs.

9. Participants raised the following points during the discussion:

- (a) The use of proxy indicators for the purpose of monitoring trends in MDGs when data quality is doubtful;
- (b) The need to enhance the knowledge of governments and civil society about MDGs;
- (c) The need for technical cooperation among ESCWA countries;
- (d) The importance for Arab countries of developing a database capable of hosting all MDG-related data and indicators and utilizing DevInfo database system in cases where no software exists.

B. GOAL 1: ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY FOR RELATED INDICATORS AND COUNTRY EXPERIENCES IN REPORTING

10. A consultant from Cairo University introduced Goal 1 of the MDG framework on poverty and hunger and discussed the methodology for the calculation of related indicators on poverty. Representatives of Kuwait, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen made presentations on the experiences of their respective countries in monitoring this goal.

11. The following points were raised during the discussion:

- (a) Incorporation in national household survey programmes of smaller surveys, conducted on a biennial basis, complementary to the more complex and costly household income and consumption surveys that are carried out on a less frequent basis;
- (b) Differences in the estimations of household income and consumption between the national accounts system and household surveys. Household surveys usually provide a value 40 per cent less than that reported by the national accounting process;

(c) Multidimensional nature of poverty and the need to adopt new indicators capable of measuring these dimensions rather than relying solely on consumption as a measure of poverty.

12. Representatives of UNICEF and FAO introduced the indicators on malnutrition and hunger, focusing on the methodology of their calculation. A representative of Sudan presented the experience of her country in monitoring this goal.

13. During the discussion, the following points were raised:

(a) Improvements to the collection of data on nourishment patterns through demographic and household surveys;

(b) Conducting household surveys on a regular and coordinated basis rather than in an ad hoc fashion;

(c) Planned national implementation in 2005 of MICS3 in order to generate data on a number of MDGs, with particular regard to poverty and hunger;

(d) Importance of adhering to the indicators agreed under the MDG framework and avoiding the substitution of MDG indicators with weighted indices in order to ensure comparability, simplicity and clarity;

(e) Monitoring trends in food and agriculture in order to provide a more accurate measure of hunger. The fundamental issue behind hunger is inequality of access to food, rather than income, as not all income is directed toward food consumption.

C. GOAL 2: ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY FOR RELATED INDICATORS AND COUNTRY EXPERIENCES IN REPORTING

14. A representative of UNESCO and a representative of the ESCWA Secretariat introduced Goal 2 of the MDG framework and discussed the methodology for calculation of the related indicators. Country presentations on monitoring this goal were made by representatives of Palestine, Morocco and Lebanon.

15. The discussions focused on the following topics:

(a) The factors accounting for discrepancies between national education statistics and those published by UNESCO. The data published by UNESCO on population size, the denominator for the computation of enrolment rates, is estimated by UNPD. This estimate can differ from national reported population size and result in a discrepancy between UNESCO and national enrolment rates;

(b) The need for regional and international organizations that publish education statistics to give priority to national figures rather than estimates and coordinate with the concerned countries to ensure their approval of the published statistics.

D. GOAL 3: PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY FOR RELATED INDICATORS AND COUNTRY EXPERIENCES IN REPORTING

16. A representative of the ESCWA Secretariat introduced Goal 3 of the MDG framework. He focused on the metadata related to the relevant indicators, including the definition, rationale, method of computation, data sources and concerned agencies and the status of these indicators in the ESCWA region. He also identified the main challenges for reaching this goal. A representative of Tunisia shared the experience of his country in monitoring Goal 3.

17. The following points were highlighted during the discussion:

(a) The need to collect data on the participation of women in the informal sector in order to reveal the full extent of their contribution to the economy;

(b) The need to improve household surveys in order to encompass specific data on the economic participation of women.

E. GOAL 4: REDUCE CHILD MORTALITY. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY
FOR RELATED INDICATORS AND COUNTRY EXPERIENCES IN REPORTING

18. A representative of WHO introduced the MDG on the reduction of child mortality and discussed methodologies for the calculation of related indicators. Country presentations in monitoring child mortality rates were made by representatives of Jordan, Oman, Iraq and Lebanon.

19. Discussions included the following main points:

(a) The importance of improving population censuses in order to generate data on child and infant mortality;

(b) The importance of selecting a representative population sample when conducting surveys, in particular as samples might at times exclude underprivileged segments of the population, such as those living in underserved remote areas;

(c) The quality of infant mortality data derived from population censuses and surveys is subject to the willingness or reluctance of respondents to discuss the matter as well as the sufficiency of their knowledge of the cause of death;

(d) Use of routine surveys and better registration of vital events for the purpose of filling data gaps.

F. GOAL 5: IMPROVE MATERNAL HEALTH: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY
FOR RELATED INDICATORS AND COUNTRY EXPERIENCES IN REPORTING

20. A representative of WHO introduced the MDG on the improvement of maternal health and discussed methodologies for the calculation of related indicators. Country presentations on monitoring this goal were made by representatives of Oman and Iraq.

21. Discussions included the following main points:

(a) Importance of the sisterhood method as an indirect method for estimation of the maternal mortality ratio;

(b) Necessity of improving data collection methods, in particular on topics related to death;

(c) Role of WHO in assisting governments through the provision of health services, training programmes and preventive services that would lead to decrease in maternal mortalities;

(d) Development of dialogue between central statistical offices and WHO in order to improve health indicators.

G. GOAL 6: COMBAT HIV/AIDS, MALARIA AND OTHER DISEASES.
OVERVIEW OF INDICATORS

22. No presentation was made on this topic as the majority of participants agreed that the indicators related to HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases were not relevant to their countries. For this reason, participants raised the issue of the importance of substituting such indicators with others pertaining to relevant diseases such as bilharzia in Egypt and cancer in Jordan.

H. GOAL 7: ENSURE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY.
OVERVIEW OF INDICATORS

23. A representative of the ESCWA Secretariat presented an overview of indicators on Goal 7, including the status of each indicator in the ESCWA region, the challenges to the achievement of Goal 7 targets, the supporting environment and priorities for national and foreign resource allocation.

24. The discussion included the following main points:

- (a) Problems facing the collection of data related to environmental conditions;
- (b) Formulation of strategies aimed at ensuring environment sustainability and integration of environment issues into development plans and programmes;
- (c) Need to better develop well-defined, measurable indicators related to environment;
- (d) Need to enhance the capacity of statisticians related to environmental data analysis.

I. GOAL 8: DEVELOP A GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT.
OVERVIEW OF INDICATORS

25. A representative of the ESCWA Secretariat presented an overview of indicators on Goal 8 related to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and another ESCWA representative presented other indicators on Goal 8 related to global partnership, including a brief review of the goal and its associated targets and indicators, as well as an overall evaluation.

26. The following main points were raised during discussion of this topic:

- (a) Need to better develop ICT indicators and their relationship to the development process as they are used by a category of the population and not the whole population;
- (b) Role played by ESCWA in the establishment of national databases on foreign direct investment (FDI) in member countries in collaboration with the United Nations Commission on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and its input into ongoing training courses, expert group meetings and capacity building seminars for government officials;
- (c) Need to derive data from national sources;
- (d) Dependency of effective partnership on trade relations and political considerations.

III. ATTENDANCE AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. DATE AND VENUE

27. The Expert Group Meeting on Data and Indicators to Monitor Progress Towards MDGs in the ESCWA Region was held in United Nations House, Beirut from 9 to 13 February 2004.

B. OPENING OF THE MEETING

28. The Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCWA, the Social Statistics and Indicators Team Leader and the Director of CAS in Lebanon, delivered opening speeches.

29. The Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCWA welcomed the Director of CAS in Lebanon, the Chief of UNSD Statistical Services Branch and the Director-General of AITRS. She thanked them for their efforts in contributing to the organization and hosting of the meeting. She emphasized the importance of statistics and indicators for policy formulation and monitoring and underscored the need to raise awareness of MDGs as well as strengthen national capacities to produce and disseminate data and indicators on them. She also provided an overview of progress towards achievement of MDGs in the region.

30. The Director of CAS in Lebanon discussed the role of the central statistical office as a focal point for cooperation and collaboration among various national statistical sources and with international development agencies. She emphasized the need for technical assistance in order to strengthen national capacities for the implementation and monitoring of MDGs.

31. The Social Statistics and Indicators Team Leader welcomed participants to the meeting and thanked CAS in Lebanon and the AITRS in Iraq for co-hosting the meeting.

C. ATTENDANCE

32. The meeting was attended by 23 representatives from 15 Arab countries, namely, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen.

33. A total of 13 development experts from seven United Nations agencies attended the meeting, including ESCWA, FAO, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNSD and WHO.

34. Among non-governmental organizations, AITRS attended the meeting.

D. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

35. The meeting adhered to the following organization of work:

- (a) Opening of the meeting;
- (b) Monitoring the implementation of the MDGs: international and regional reporting;
- (c) Monitoring the implementation of the MDGs: national reporting;
- (d) Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger: indicators on poverty;
- (e) Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger: indicators on malnutrition and hunger;
- (f) Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education;
- (g) Goal 3: Promote gender and the empowerment of women;
- (h) Goal 4: Reduce child mortality;
- (i) Goal 5: Improve maternal health;
- (j) Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
- (k) Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability;
- (l) Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development.

Annex I

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* Names, functions and other participant details have, wherever possible, been verified.

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Annex II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Symbol	Title
E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/WG.1/INF.1	Information Note (Arabic and English)
E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/WG.1/L.1	Proposed organization of work (Arabic and English)
ST/ESA/STAT/SER.F/95	Indicators for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals (manual)
E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/WG.1/2	Methodology for measuring poverty (Arabic and English)
E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/WG.1/CP.1	Country report – Lebanon
E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/WG.1/CP.2	Country report – Morocco
E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/WG.1/CP.3	Country report – Libyan Arab Jamahiriya
E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/WG.1/CP.4	Country report – Iraq
E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/WG.1/CP.5	Country report – Kuwait
No symbol	Country report – Qatar
No symbol	Country report – Tunisia
No symbol	Qatar report on goal 4
No symbol	Country report – Iraq
No symbol	Oman report on goals 4 & 5
No symbol	ESCWA presentation on “Current and Future Status of MDG in the ESCWA Region” (in Arabic)
No symbol	ESCWA presentation on goal 2 (in Arabic)
No symbol	ESCWA presentation on goal 3 (in Arabic)
No symbol	ESCWA presentation on goal 7 (in Arabic)
No symbol	ESCWA presentation on goal 8 (in English)
No symbol	ESCWA presentation on “ICTs in the service of MDGs” (in English)
No symbol	UNESCO presentation on “UIS contribution to the MDGs global monitoring report”
No symbol	FAO presentation on “food deprivation: introduction and methodology”
No symbol	FAO presentation on “lessons learned from regional capacity building workshops”
No symbol	WHO presentation on “Tracking progress and measuring achievements”
No symbol	WHO presentation on the health indicators

Symbol	Title
No symbol	Iraq presentation on some statistics for health indicators
No symbol	Jordan presentation on country report preparation
No symbol	Jordan presentation on goal 4
No symbol	Morocco presentation on goal 2
No symbol	Palestine presentation on country report preparation
No symbol	Palestine presentation on goal 1
No symbol	Palestine presentation on goal 2
No symbol	Palestine presentation on goal 4
No symbol	Syrian Arab Republic presentation on goal 1
No symbol	Yemen presentation on goal 1
