



Post-2015 Data Test
country level experiences

Measuring Sustainable Development to 2030: A view from Turkey

Report Highlights

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About the study

In 2015, governments will negotiate a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which expire in 2015. Like the MDGs, the SDGs will comprise goals, targets and indicators against which countries and the world will track progress on sustainable development. But unlike the MDGs, the SDGs are set to be universal in nature, applying to all countries, including middle-income developing countries like Turkey. The implementation of the SDGs is also expected to allow countries space to identify their own national priorities within the broad sustainable development framework. A key question in this context is how the SDGs will be effectively applied across countries at different stages of development. In an effort to address this question, this report examines what the SDGs could mean for Turkey. It is part of a broader multi-country initiative – the Post-2015 Data Test – which looks at how the SDGs could be applied and measured across a range of low-, middle- and high-income countries.

The key objective of this study is to identify the opportunities and challenges that may arise for Turkey from the implementation of a universal, country-relevant SDG framework, including those related to measuring progress. The study unpacks Turkey's national priorities for candidate goals, targets and indicators in seven areas – poverty, education, employment and inclusive growth, energy and infrastructure, environmental sustainability and disaster resilience, governance, and global partnership for sustainable development. It provides an overview of key data sources and identifies the factors for realising progress in the Turkish context.

The report makes a number of valuable contributions. First, it serves as a comprehensive overview of Turkey's sustainable development challenges, broadly understood in terms of economic, social and environmental well-being. Second, the report also takes stock of the current state of Turkey's national statistical system and data availability for monitoring progress on the SDGs. Given the breadth of issues addressed, the report is divided into sections according to candidate SDG areas and measurement issues. Finally, the report provides a concrete example of how a universal, country-relevant sustainable development agenda could be applied to middle-income developing countries.

Key findings

Sustainable Development in Turkey

Turkey is a middle-income developing country where most of the MDGs have been met. Lagging behind on gender issues and to some extent equality and environmental issues, the country is facing the middle-income trap and overcoming it is a major concern. Turkey's emphasis in discussions on the post-2015 framework centres on issues related to inclusiveness and quality across goal areas such as education and governance. The leading role played by the Turkish Ministry of Development is indicative of the importance attached to these issues. Although the general public and even academics do not closely follow progress on the MDGs or the SDG process, the concerned government entities are actively involved in MDG achievement and negotiations going forward. Turkey has had a fairly successful record with regard to the MDGs, particularly eradicating extreme poverty. Its principal shortcomings are in the areas of promoting gender equality and empowering women as well as ensuring environmental

sustainability. The Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) is fully aware of the eventual demands that will fall upon it once the post-2015 framework is adopted.

The study finds that Turkey has participated in the ongoing negotiations on the post-2015 framework. In the context of the participatory process initiated by the United Nations Development Programme, Turkey's priorities were inequalities and poverty, which were regarded as the underlying causes of deficiencies and challenges across all the thematic areas, though the issue at the forefront was gender equality. Turkey seeks to make the post-2015 framework human-centred, just and equitable. So far as the development problematique of the country is concerned, avoiding (or getting out of) the middle-income trap appears to be a key issue. At the global level, Turkey shares the vision of an equitable, rights-based and sustainable process of global development, which the post-2015 process is expected to support.

Addressing poverty and inequalities, particularly gender inequality, is a key priority for Turkey post-2015. Turkey will also take steps to break through the middle-income trap.

Regarding the selection of national targets and indicators, given that targets are fairly general and comprehensive, no new targets were included other than those that were in the long list of targets suggested during the Ministry of Development's preparatory process for the negotiations on the post-2015 framework. New national indicators were linked to selected targets from this list. In many instances these selections align with the concerns expressed during the national consultations on the post-2015 agenda, as mentioned above, but no attempt has been made to ensure one-to-one correspondence. Indicators were proposed when it was predicted that missing data could be generated. Migration, which is an issue of not only local but global concern since it has potentially significant effects for sustainable development, is a case in point.

In education, quality rather than quantity is the concern in Turkey. Rather than being concerned about the number of students attending school, their comparative standing with respect to other countries is more relevant for Turkey. Data requirements for identifying the reasons of unsatisfactory results, such as teacher turnover, are an important data-related concern for the government.

In terms of promoting employment and realising inclusive growth, ample employment-related data are available. However, some interesting information can only be found in the microdata of surveys. Some definitional problems such as identifying representative occupations arise in monitoring gender equality. Notably, the issue of work-related injuries – important for Turkey –has not been satisfactorily monitored. This suggests that additional emphasis on the data revolution is needed.

While energy-related data are available, some of it may be less meaningful than expected. For example, the environmental impact of hydroelectric generation may be negative. This has implications for interpreting indicators related to the use of renewable energy in the Turkish context. On infrastructure, macro-level data are satisfactory but disaggregation is often unsuitable for monitoring the candidate SDGs. Some potential targets, such as availability of modern cooking solutions, are not relevant for countries at Turkey's level of development.

Regarding environmental sustainability, what some of the targets and indicators measure, such as a percentage of a country's forest area or frequency of disasters, may need careful interpretation in country contexts because progress is largely determined by a country's geographical location. Some indicators, such as that on water availability, are both nationally and globally important and should be included.

Some indicators, such as that on a country's ecological footprint, are more relevant as part of a globally implemented programme that includes comparisons.

The biggest concern for governance-related indicators is that many are based on perceptions. Not only do perceptions differ among different social groups, but in Turkey they may not be correctly reported. Information is often unsuitable for statistical use.

Finally, the selection of targets and indicators for global partnership will require important consideration. For example, separating South-South cooperation from general development cooperation is not meaningful for Turkey, which only provides "aid." While measurements regarding the existence of duty-free, quota-free treatment for developing country imports are useful, whether treatment is effectively applied or restricted may be more meaningful.

The feasibility of global minimum targets was examined to determine whether the selected targets are formulated in a way that allows the determination of a global minimum level and whether monitoring is possible. Most proposed targets, such as "Provide free and universal legal identity, such as birth registrations," are both meaningful and measurable. Sometimes, however, what is meant is unclear (e.g., ensuring "full access" to developed infrastructure). Moreover, it is important to ask whether it makes sense to strive for reaching certain global minimum targets. In some cases, progress on one indicator depends on progress on others. In some others, the minimum target, (e.g., publishing environmental accounts) can be achieved but achievement may not be meaningful for achieving the desired goal (e.g., the goal "Establish a sustainable, healthy and resilient environment for all" depends on how published environmental accounts are used).

Measuring Progress Post-2015

Regarding measuring progress on post-2015 in Turkey, data availability in Turkey is considered satisfactory in general, although some gaps exist. Most important among these, and particularly important for the SDGs, is disaggregation along ethnic lines. Sometimes – with considerable difficulty – a partial remedy may be found by using microdata. Nevertheless, minorities and ethnic groups more broadly are almost impossible to identify. Official statistics do not provide information according to ethnic identities. Given Turkey's difficult history with regard to various minorities, asking survey respondents to identify their ethnicity could result in unforeseen biases in official data collection efforts. Standard markers – such as mother tongue and, more recently, ethnicity – are indicated in Turkey's Demographic and Health Survey, but the sample sizes are small and independent verification of whether adequate coverage has been achieved is not possible. This data gap precludes the use of any targets that call for reducing ethnic inequalities.

Overall, data availability is satisfactory in Turkey, though additional steps will be needed to track disparities between regions and minority groups.

Administrative data is not being harnessed to its full potential and could be harnessed to improve data availability.

Another challenge is tracking changes at the regional level. Following recent laws targeting municipal demarcations (most recently in 2012), urban/rural disaggregation became rather meaningless in much of Turkey. TurkStat decided to adjust its sample frame to reflect the administrative changes. As a consequence, it stopped releasing data based on urban/rural distinctions until further research is completed (microdata would allow this disaggregation albeit with some difficulty and extra work). This hinders consistency and reduces availability of information. Problems with disaggregation probably occur in many countries. One way to address this issue may be to disaggregate according to the dominance of agricultural or non-agricultural activities.

The statistical work of TurkStat conforms to international standards, particularly since the institute follows Eurostat's methods and procedures in much of its work, especially surveys. One of the limitations that constrains data availability in Turkey is that administrative data, collected by various parts of the government, are used at less than full potential. Thus, considerable amounts of highly reliable data remain unexploited by researchers. If more administrative data were utilised, problems with sources that need to be solved notwithstanding, data quality would improve and more resources could become available for alternative uses, such as conducting surveys, which are the principal means for generating original data and information.

The availability of data in Turkey for monitoring of the selected goals, targets and indicators seems fairly satisfactory but certain significant gaps exist. The data mapping component of the study led to the identification of 124 sources for the 97 indicators studied. Roughly 43 percent of indicators are available from TurkStat, and about 38 percent from other domestic sources. International sources have to be consulted for about 16 percent of indicators examined for all Post-2015 Data Test country studies – global indicators – and 11 percent of the indicators selected specifically for the Turkey case study – national indicators. Data were unavailable for about 4 percent of global indicators and 8 percent of national indicators. Data are available for a baseline of 2007 for all goals. Information on minorities, ethnic groups and migrants is essentially unavailable. The lack of data constrains the assessment and evaluation of some crucial elements of progress on reducing inequalities, identified as one of the important concerns in Turkey. Information is also missing on some indicators that may be important in the global context, such as the percentage of adults with an account at a formal financial institution. Perception-based indicators are also rather poor.

Problems with participation rates aside, the quality of data made public by TurkStat is good. The data collected, tabulated and announced by the institute are particularly good when done according to Eurostat standards. Many of the definitions used by Turkey concur with those of Eurostat or international organisations such as the International Labour Organization, although sometimes there are problems with applicability. Some Eurostat standards and certain related questions used in surveys are not the most appropriate for Turkey. Information published by TurkStat is easily accessible and the institute's website is user-friendly. The large number of TurkStat webpages listed in this report's references section demonstrates the extent of data availability.

Data quality in Turkey is good, particularly when it is produced according to Eurostat standards. The data quality assessment revealed that data is highly accurate, reliable, timely, coherent, and comparable in general. Room for improvement exists with respect to relevance, accessibility and clarity.

An extensive data quality assessment demonstrated the extent to which the quality of data is good. Considering all of the goal areas together, scores for "accuracy and reliability" as well as "timeliness and punctuality" were the highest. The score for "coherence and comparability" follows, benefiting from links with Eurostat. The score for "relevance" is hurt by problems with education data. Significant improvements are needed on accessibility. Access restrictions to microdata by administrative bodies undermine data quality. In some cases, such as the use of electronic registration for school, the reality may be considerably different from what is reported.

Improving the National Statistical System

The main source of data, TurkStat, is professional, impartial, and respected, but it is not administratively independent. Other entities that generate data, such as the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey, are also highly esteemed institutions. No political intervention is observed in the process of data collection, manipulation, publication, though may exist in deciding what data to collect. Some ministries, agencies and directorates are not professionally equipped to collect key statistical data. Resourcing could be improved to considerably increase the availability of reliable, comparable information. Reinforcing TurkStat's coordinating role could also help improve data availability and reliability. Very good data are generated in conjunction with Eurostat, but some areas, such as the applicability of common questions in surveys, require review, which is being done. There are few non-governmental sources of official data. The roles of academic institutions and civil society organisations in this respect could be usefully expanded and facilitated. TurkStat could provide leadership in supporting such organisations, which could considerably improve data availability.

TurkStat could play an important role in facilitating the greater use of administrative data in Turkey, particularly in terms of ensuring reliability and consistency.

Problems originating within administrative units of the central government may be due to the reluctance to make data public or share them with TurkStat given concerns that poor results will become widely known. Although TurkStat does not say this, it is purported that administrative microdata are not shared with the institute. An important avenue for improving data availability is the expanded use of administrative records. This necessitates some upgrading in terms of the statistical procedures of administrative units that collect data. Further coordination with TurkStat and following TurkStat's guidance would be very important in terms of ensuring consistency and reliability.

TurkStat's microdata are available to the public within the confines of confidentiality. Some legal constraints exist and punishment is mandated for those responsible for leaking confidential data. Sometimes, however, such constraints are contrary to the principles of openness, such as in the case of tax information. In general, the use of statistical data in governmental decision making is often rudimentary. The same can be said about the media, opinion leaders and public opinion as well. Thus, those who have the information are not hard-pressed to make it available because it is not widely demanded.

One of the main results expected from the data revolution is that the vast amount of the central government's administrative data will be able to be turned into usable statistical information that meets strict quality requirements including not only accuracy, reliability and timeliness but also clarity, coherence and comparability. TurkStat also expects that subjective indicators, such as life satisfaction and mental health, will be better covered both in the post-2015 framework and data collection work.

Members of civil society expect the data revolution to result in the collection and dissemination of official data on socially and politically sensitive subjects, or at least the validation of their own data by government entities. These subjects are specified in many of the indicators proposed for the goal area on governance and some for the goal areas on employment and environment. Furthermore, better accessibility to data collected by administrative bodies would be a desirable outcome. The expectations of academics are somewhat similar to those of members of civil society more generally – they would like to see some major gaps that hamper their research filled. Segments of the Turkish bureaucracy, particularly

those participating in international meetings, would like to have access to complete datasets that are required at those meetings.

Implications for the Sustainable Development Framework and Monitoring Post-2015

An examination of possible targets and indicators for seven candidate SDG areas – poverty, education, employment and inclusive growth, energy and infrastructure, environmental sustainability and disaster resilience, governance and global partnership for sustainable development – shows that the SDGs are relevant for Turkey. Most of the proposed global targets examined under this study are relevant for Turkey, but this study reveals that careful consideration will be needed in ongoing post-2015 negotiations on goals, targets and indicators to ensure their relevance across countries at different levels of development. For example, in the Turkish context, given that abject poverty has been nearly eliminated, concerns focus more on equality, both regionally and intra-regionally. Important issues that attract Turkish policy-makers' attention include material deprivation, populations at risk and multidimensional poverty.

Some of the data problems observed in Turkey are of a general nature and probably relevant globally. These include response problems in surveys and reporting problems, particularly for gender-based violence. In many developing countries, such as Turkey, the existence of rules is not a good proxy for desired outcomes. Focusing on rules may provide a misleading picture of reality. For some indicators, multiplicity may also distort the view of the actual situation. For example, the same internet account can be used by several people or one person can have several bank accounts, which may make it difficult to capture accurate internet- and banking-related figures. These issues can only be remedied by resorting to microdata available in surveys. Some definitional questions also arise – for example, measuring “full access to developed infrastructure” will require additional work on relevant definitions.

Finally, even with the best data and indicators, the usefulness of the post-2015 framework depends on what policy-makers do with them. The main problem is the lack of interest in data-driven, evidence-based policy making. The challenge here is how to persuade policy-makers and practitioners that the new set of goals, targets and indicators are important tools of sustainable development policy and to help them use the next framework, at least as one of their guides, in policy design, implementation and assessment. Policy-makers may be reluctant to use the framework or appear disinterested if the goals and targets do not coincide with their political priorities. Or they may be simply unaware of how to use it. Opinion leaders and the general public who might advocate for the post-2015 process may also be uninformed. Increasing public awareness is an important aspect of the second challenge. There is a sense among researchers that, even if data were available and relevant for political priorities, there is significant reluctance to acknowledge the importance of hard data and analytical knowledge and mistrust toward those involved in such work.

There will be a need to increase acceptance among governments and policy-makers that the consolidated post-2015 framework is the result of arduous international negotiations. The next set of goals, targets and indicators will be worthy of monitoring and taking into account in policy making and implementation. Increasing acceptance will likely be difficult. The MDGs and proposed SDGs are not supported outside a small group of Turkish bureaucrats involved in ongoing negotiations and those providing support to them, including a smaller group of academics and a still smaller group in the media.

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