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Towards an Action Plan for Monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals in Turkey

Mehmet Arda

TOWARDS AN ACTION PLAN FOR MONITORING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN TURKEY

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Mehmet Arda

Dr Mehmet Arda is an Executive Board Member at the Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies (EDAM), Turkey. He can be reached at: mehmarda@gmail.com

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Southern Voice on Post-MDG International Development Goals

Website: www.southernvoice.org

E-mail: info@southernvoice.org

Secretariat: Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)

House - 6/2 (7th & 8th floors), Block - F

Kazi Nazrul Islam Road, Lalmatia Housing Estate

Dhaka -1207, Bangladesh

Telephone: (+88 02) 9141734, 9141703, 9126402, 9143326 & 8124770

Fax: (+88 02) 8130951; E-mail: info@cpd.org.bd

Website: www.cpd.org.bd

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Editor

Debapriya Bhattacharya, PhD

Chair, *Southern Voice on Post-MDG International Development Goals*

and Distinguished Fellow, CPD

E-mail: debapriya.bh@gmail.com

Cover Design

Avra Bhattacharjee

Preface

Southern Voice on Post-MDG International Development Goals (Southern Voice) is a network of 49 think tanks from Africa, Asia and Latin America, which was founded in 2012 to serve as an open platform to contribute to the global discourse tied to the formation, implementation, monitoring and mid-course review of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The *Post-2015 Data Test* was a pioneering multi-country project, which was conceived and implemented in the period immediately following the release of the Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Co-led by the *Southern Voice*, the *Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (NPSIA)* and the *Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)*, the project was implemented in Bangladesh, Canada, Peru, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Turkey to assess the manner in which the post-2015 agenda may be measured and implemented across a range of country contexts.

After the successful completion of the collaborative seven-country project, *Southern Voice* decided to undertake a follow-up exercise based on conclusions and recommendations of the project's previous country studies. Under the follow-up exercise, four countries, viz. Bangladesh, Senegal, Tanzania and Turkey have prepared country-level Data Action Plans for addressing the capacity gaps and data deficits with regard to the implementation of the SDGs, which were unanimously adopted at the Sustainable Development Summit of the United Nations in New York in September 2015.

The present study captioned **Towards an Action Plan for Monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals in Turkey** is the final issue of the four country-level Data Action Plans to be published under the Southern Voice Occasional Paper Series. According to the study, four principal areas, e.g. disaggregated data, continuity of statistical time series, utilisation of administrative and unofficial data, and general problems with statistical information need to be prioritised in monitoring the SDGs in the country. Surveying two recent activities towards SDG monitoring at the country: a) *Wellbeing Index for the Provinces* by the TurkStat; and b) Turkey's active participation towards a *UNECE Action Plan*, it also includes proposals to feed into formation of an SDG Monitoring Action Plan and promote the useful integration of statistical data in policy design and implementation for Turkey.

The study has been authored by *Dr Mehmet Arda*, Executive Board Member at the Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies (EDAM) – Turkey.

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Debapriya Bhattacharya, PhD
Chair, Southern Voice on Post-MDG International Development Goals
and
Distinguished Fellow, CPD
E-mail: debapriya.bh@gmail.com

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Monitoring the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires a considerable amount of data. Regardless of their level of development, most countries' statistical services demand some adaptation or improvement in an attempt to reduce, to the greatest possible extent, the current lacunae in information. In Turkey, one area that requires particular improvement is data disaggregation, especially according to social groupings, and along a rural-urban distinction that reflects a more functional understanding of this distinction. Administrative data collected during the delivery of governmental services could provide substantial amounts of relevant information; however, at present such collection processes are neither regular nor systematic. Ensuring consistency and continuity in the collection, measurement and definitions of data, as well as promoting improvements in the formulation of survey questions, could go a long way to improving the availability of information in Turkey, both for SDG monitoring and for the general design and implementation of policies and measures. While Turkey intends to follow the SDG Monitoring Road Map being developed by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), important work by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) on developing a Wellbeing Index is an already significant step forward towards improving the SDG monitoring in Turkey.

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Acronyms

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EU	European Union
EU-SILC	European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NUTS	Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TurkStat	Turkish Statistical Institute
UN	United Nations
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly

Towards an Action Plan for Monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals in Turkey

Mehmet Arda

1. Introduction

Background

On 21 October 2015, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted the Resolution 70/1, “Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (2030 Agenda). Under its Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17, “[s]trengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development,” subparagraphs 17.18 and 17.19 concern “[d]ata, monitoring and accountability,” with specific actions and target dates for achievement set. While 2030 is taken to be the target date for most actions within the 2030 Agenda, paragraph 17.18 is one of the relatively few more urgent targets, with a target date set for 2020. It states:

By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing States, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.

Paragraph 17.19, which is of somewhat more general nature, then states:

By 2030, build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product, and support statistical capacity-building in developing countries.

The message provided by these two paragraphs is that there is an urgent need to improve the quality, timeliness and reliability of data, and to achieve disaggregation by various dimensions that are relevant and significant to specific national contexts. This is indeed important for measuring the range and reach of sustainable development pursued by the 2030 Agenda. The implication of these statements is that the nature of statistical services differs between countries, that disaggregation needs general improvement, and that there are country-specific dimensions of disaggregation that are of particular significance.

In this context, there will be an increasing demand placed on statistical offices to provide data, some of which may have not been traditionally available. An action plan that takes into account the specifics of each country, in terms of availability and quality of SDG-related data, would therefore be useful in this respect. However, the objectives of an ‘SDG Monitoring Action Plan’ in Turkey should not be confined solely to the SDG process. Three interconnected outcomes should be expected from implementing such an action plan. Firstly, in line with its immediate objective of filling any SDG-related data gaps, such an action plan should aim at identifying technical and financial lacunae, and upgrading the institutional framework and human resources to enable SDG monitoring to take place satisfactorily. Secondly, it should be designed so as to improve, at least as a by-product, the availability of statistical data that may not be directly related to SDG indicators, but is nevertheless important for monitoring the country’s general social and economic development, and for designing policies in this respect. Thirdly, it should promote the use of hard statistical evidence by policymakers and practitioners. Not dealing with any

of these three elements would mean missing out on the essence of the SDGs, weakening the associated 'data revolution', and frustrating the impetus generated by the entire post-2015 process.

As part of these introductory remarks, it is useful to recall that Turkey's performance in respect to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was satisfactory in most areas, except for gender equality and environmental protection. As such, data regarding these and other closely-related indicators, for instance for education for gender equality, or the implementation of laws and regulations for environmental protection, will require particular attention. Further, emphasis should not be simply placed on data availability, but also on the dissemination of such data and its use in policy design and implementation. A similar observation can be made for those indicators relevant to poverty and inequality, which were the primary concerns put forward by the Turkish public in consultations preceding the drafting of the SDGs.

Aims and objectives

This paper summarises the needs in Turkey related to monitoring SDGs, as stated in the Turkey Report (Arda *et al.*, 2015), and reviews relevant steps taken or contemplated by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) since undertaking that study. It includes a series of proposals that should form part of an SDG Monitoring Action Plan for Turkey, as they would facilitate satisfying the requirements that are expected to arise. Its principal objective is to provide information on the state of preparations in Turkey for SDG monitoring, including data availability, institutional aspects and the needs for improvement. In doing so, it is also intended to provide some proposals which may be useful not only for SDG monitoring, but also for promoting the utilisation of statistical data in policy design and implementation.

Report structure

This paper begins, in Section 2, with a systematic review of the current shortcomings in SDG-related data, as identified in the Turkey Report, and presents some of the proposals made. These can be considered as the principal elements of an SDG Monitoring Action Plan for Turkey. While the Turkey Report is organised according to seven goal areas, the shortcomings and the proposals made here are classified in more general and generic terms, rather than by goal area. This typology is considered more appropriate as it allows the more general concerns to be addressed (in line with the three interconnected outcomes mentioned above), and goes beyond monitoring SDG-related data solely. Annex 1 provides an action matrix designed along these lines.

Following this review based on the Turkey Report, Section 3 will present a brief survey of two relevant, recent activities that can be considered as building blocks for Turkey's monitoring of SDG indicators. The first is the release, in January 2016, of a new "Wellbeing Index for the Provinces" (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2016); and the second is Turkey's active participation in the work of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) on devising an SDG Monitoring Action Plan in the UNECE region (UNECE, 2015). Finally, as the paper concludes in Section 4, some further recommendations will be made as regards progress towards successful SDG monitoring and the useful integration of these indicators into policy design and implementation.

2. Data Availability and Improvement Priorities

As stated in the Turkey Report, data availability in Turkey is satisfactory for most of the goal areas that are covered in the report. Of the total seven goal areas listed, data availability was considered at least 'good' for five areas, namely poverty, employment and inclusive growth, education, environment and disaster resilience, and global partnership. Data availability was considered to be 'fair' for the two remaining areas of energy and infrastructure, and governance. Nevertheless, some particular gaps still exist, especially as regards disaggregation. This section will present four principal areas in which

improvements should be prioritised with the aim of monitoring the SDGs and improving the use of such data for policy design and implementation.

Many of the areas where improvements are proposed, namely the key elements of the action plan are important for policy design and implementation, and go beyond simply data needs for SDG monitoring. Given the importance attached to information and monitoring in SDGs, as well as international commitments to implement a 'data revolution' action plan for Turkey should also indicate any financial or technical constraints that can be foreseen, for example by TurkStat which may be called to assume new roles to oversee statistical work of other bodies.

Disaggregation

Disaggregation is necessary to ensure that SDG monitoring is meaningful in assessing progress and plays a useful role in policy making. It is important to track SDG indicators not only at a macro level or as national averages, but also in a disaggregated manner so as to identify specific areas where targeted action is particularly necessary. The axis of disaggregation depends on the particular goal, target or indicator, as well as on the specificities of the country context. The 2030 Agenda explicitly mentions income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability and geographic location as disaggregation criterion. In Turkey, the general public has indicated that improving equality in all of its dimensions should be a high priority.

In Turkey, disaggregation by gender and/or age is available for many indicators. It is also possible to access a considerable proportion of Turkish data on a regional basis, for example Gini coefficients or regional value added. However, there is a lack of easily available data disaggregated according to some particularly important variables for SDGs, including ethnicity and social grouping. While it would be interesting to have this information, some current political and social reasons can be used to justify and, in fact, discourage such disaggregation. Nonetheless, microdata could be mined in order to reach an acceptable level of disaggregation for these variables.

Geographic disaggregation of data, according to regions and administrative divisions (provinces), is fairly well-developed in Turkey. Regional disaggregation for much statistical data is being improved from 12 to 26 regions, as defined in the Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics (NUTS) II. A more 'functional' disaggregation between rural and urban areas was relatively easy until a recent change in the administrative regulations in 2013, which now makes such disaggregation very difficult. For instance, it is impossible to differentiate urban centres from rural areas that surround them when they are in the same administrative zone. Controversies over the definition of rural and urban areas notwithstanding, rural/urban disaggregation often necessitates the use of microdata. In some cases, data is classified according to provinces, and the recently released 'Wellbeing Index for the Provinces' (which will be discussed in some detail later in the paper) provides much useful, disaggregated information for each administrative province. If rural/urban disaggregation is necessary, provinces can be classified according to proxies. This could be a specific part of an SDG Monitoring Action Plan because of the particular emphasis placed in the 2030 Agenda on sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11). As the collection of data on a rural-urban distinction came to an end in 2013, it should be possible to take 2013 as a baseline year for the purpose of SDG monitoring and adopt an alternative way of classifying provinces as either 'rural' or 'urban', for example, according to province population density, the population of the main town, or by principal economic activity (either agricultural or non-agricultural). An additional issue is that the regional definitions used by ministries that provide useful administrative data do not always correspond to those definitions used in the statistics. Although this may at first glance appear to be a relatively simple issue to resolve, established internal structures of ministries preclude any quick remedy. An action plan should therefore include the harmonising of regional definitions and structures.

Migratory status is one of the disaggregation axes mentioned in the 2030 Agenda. In Turkey, the current inflow of refugees has created significant upheaval in several areas of social and economic life,

including employment. As a large number of refugees are not registered, and the majority of refugees do not have work permits, they are not counted in surveys that rely on registered addresses. In essence, this is not just an issue of a lack of data, but actually one of missing data. According to Official Statistics Portal of the Turkish Government, once refugees are registered as immigrants, they will be better recognised in official statistics, and such statistics will more accurately reflect the actual situation.¹ This is an example of one aspect of the SDG Monitoring Action Plan that could go far beyond the specifics of the SDGs alone. A new administrative arrangement, implemented in April 2014, has shifted the responsibility for recording and providing statistics on residence permits, refugee and asylum seekers, and illegal migration, from the Directorate General for Security (Emniyet Genel Müdürlüğü) to the Directorate General for Migration Affairs (Göç İşleri Genel Müdürlüğü). This shift may generate information that is more appropriate for SDG monitoring as the new body is specifically focused on migration issues.

Data disaggregation is also a very important issue in the preparation of a UNECE Action Plan (paragraphs 23-24), as discussed below in the context of Turkey's recent SDG monitoring activities.

Continuity

As a result of TurkStat's efforts to improve the quality and coverage of information, as well as making adjustments to its methodology often in order to harmonise with European Union (EU) or United Nations (UN) standards, breaks can occur in the continuity of statistical time series in Turkey. Poverty data is a case in point, as, despite efforts being made to adjust backward laggings, breaks sometimes remain in the series. It is therefore necessary to identify datasets for the purpose of SDG monitoring and to ensure that these series are complete and consistent from the baseline date for the entire period of SDG implementation.

Continuity, however, is not only an issue of discontinuity in the time series. In the Turkey Report, much of the most promising information for SDG monitoring was to be found in one-off studies or in studies undertaken at irregular intervals. For example, special and occasional reports provide a significant proportion of the available data for infrastructure and energy, meaning that data availability for this goal area can only be considered to be 'fair'. For such studies to occur at regular intervals using a consistent methodology would be an important step towards ensuring satisfactory SDG monitoring. Comparatively, TurkStat's occasional studies are more regular. For example, TurkStat releases reports on a particular day that are dedicated to demographic groups such as children, the elderly, women or persons with disabilities, or on issues such as the utilisation of time. These reports provide important, in-depth information on various aspects of sustainable development. Expanding and further regularising these studies could form one element of an SDG Monitoring Action Plan. This Action Plan could also include the process of identifying studies that originate from other official or unofficial sources and academia, and either include these in official work programmes or provide incentives to non-governmental sources to repeat these on a regular basis. Naturally, it would be desirable for such work to be overseen by TurkStat or by another official body that may be established to coordinate SDG monitoring. It should also be noted that, similar to most of the proposals made in this report, such work is needed not only for the purpose of SDG monitoring, but to improve the statistical work in general.

Analytical studies are another type of study important for understanding the impact of policies and measures, particularly the causality between action and impact. However, such studies may not demand continuity and repetition. This is because analytical studies do not necessarily generate data but instead go beyond basic indicators by providing significant information on real costs and benefits, the actual nature of changes observed, and cross impacts (which can even, on occasion, be contradictory). Such studies are particularly important for SDG monitoring. SDGs cannot be reduced down to simple numbers given the complexity of the actual objectives. Indeed, regardless of the quality

¹<http://www.resmiistatistik.gov.tr/?q=tr/content/213-uluslararasi-g%C3%B6%C3%A7-istatistikleri> Retrieved 22 August 2016.

of the numbers, impact analyses should nevertheless form part of the monitoring programme. This need is reflected and underscored in the 2030 Agenda, which calls for developing “measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product” (paragraph 17.19).

Administrative data and unofficial information

One of the main results expected globally from the ‘data revolution’ is that it will be possible to transform the vast amount of administrative data held by central or local governments into usable statistical information that meets strict quality requirements, including not only accuracy, reliability and timeliness, but also clarity, coherence and comparability. One of the limitations on data availability in Turkey is that administrative records, which are collected by various governmental agencies, are not used to their full potential. As a result, considerable amounts of highly relevant and reliable data remain unavailable. For example, in regards to indicators for violence, relevant data usually comes from court cases, however, administrative police records could provide better information as this is available regardless of whether or not a complaint ends in court. Also, the stigma and costs associated with a court case, and the mediation role played by the police, can result in fewer court cases, which therefore tends to misrepresent the actual situation in reality.

Transferring administrative information into statistical databases is not so straightforward, however, due to problems related to definition and classification. Administrative data frequently fails to correspond to either international or domestic (including regional divisions) coding standards. A lack of coherence among Turkish ministries, agencies and directorates exacerbates this situation. In principle, it should be simple to remedy this situation with some minor adjustments that bring this administrative data into conformity with internationally-accepted standards and definitions. This, however, requires the willingness of ministries, agencies and directorates to change established customs, which may not be easy given that these customary procedures have been formed according to particular functions, purposes and internal administrative structures. Moreover, even if there is a willingness or an obligation to change, it necessitates upgrading statistical skills. Although the data may already exist, restrictions on access to microdata in the administrative units undermine its usefulness. The independence and impartiality of these domestic entities is important, but criticism is targeted mostly towards apparent incompetence, owing to the unavailability of trained personnel (rather than intentional poor performance). As regards the proposed SDG Monitoring Action Plan, highly qualified staff from TurkStat could provide training as part of the plan. If it were possible to better utilise more administrative data, this would not only increase the amount of available information, and often its quality, but also free highly-qualified statisticians within TurkStat to work on more technically demanding activities, rather than the simple manipulation of data.

The 10th Development Plan of Turkey 2014-2018 (Bakanlığı, 2013) recognises this issue, including among its objectives ‘the generation of information by administrative units in accordance with international classification and codes’, ‘the expansion of institutional databases and their opening to TurkStat’, and the provision of advisory services by TurkStat in these areas. It also includes the proportion of administrative data used in statistics as a performance indicator. In its decision on 25 March 2014, the Statistical Council of Turkey emphasised the aim of increasing the amount of statistics generated from registered data.² Increasingly, the use of such data has become one of TurkStat’s major concerns. It is estimated that TurkStat currently uses publicly-registered data in approximately 37 per cent of the total information it generates, however, this figure could reach beyond 70 per cent. TurkStat does have a directive on access to microdata, with the rules, rights and obligations of users clearly stated, which could apply to other public institutions that also generate administrative data.

The importance of utilising administrative data has been emphasised in UNECE Action Plan discussions, particularly by Denmark, which has proposed a project titled ‘Measuring SDGs using Administrative Data’ (paragraph 24).

²[http://www.resmiistatistik.gov.tr/misc/istatistik_konseyi_10_toplantisi%20\(25\).pdf](http://www.resmiistatistik.gov.tr/misc/istatistik_konseyi_10_toplantisi%20(25).pdf)

Some general problems with statistical information

Survey questions and perceptions

Surveys carried out by TurkStat provide the basis of much statistical information in Turkey. Unfortunately, as in many countries, such surveys suffer from non-participation and response bias. Although participation in surveys is mandatory, it cannot be enforced in practice. Fines can be levied for non-participation, however, these are not a significant motivator, particularly not for people with higher incomes, which generates a bias as non-response is not randomly distributed. Response bias, which occurs when incorrect answers are provided, could be corrected to a certain extent if there were reliable administrative data. A campaign to raise public awareness of the civic duty to respond to surveys could be considered.

One other problem, particularly with surveys based on Eurostat practices and standard questions, is that survey questions may not be particularly appropriate in the Turkish context. These practices have been recently adopted, in accordance with Eurostat's set of sustainable development indicators, although TurkStat, which uses questions from the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) instrument, is working on a new question format. In this regard, TurkStat organises expert workshops, which are mainly attended by data users, in order to improve the meaningfulness, appropriateness and comprehensibility of survey questions. For example, culinary habits vary markedly in different countries and even locations. A question based on eating meat as a measure of poverty may therefore generate misleading results if the national cuisine is based more on pulses than meat as the main source of protein, as is the case in Turkey. Further, a question asking whether a respondent has taken a vacation may prompt a different answer from a question asking whether the respondent has made a family visit. Such adjustments are now being made to survey questions, meaning that improvements should be made as to the reliability of data on a number of SDG-related indicators.

Regarding the reliability of surveys and reporting, some shortcomings are evident due to a reluctance to participate given a fear of legal processes. For example, occupational injury and death rates are considered important indicators for Turkey and other countries at a similar stage of development. The official reporting of work-related accidents and deaths, however, is precarious, owing to fines and other forms of punishment that may follow. In this area, the best available data can be sourced from civil society organisations (CSOs). Labour unions could also conduct much useful work in this regard. TurkStat publishes occasional, official reports based on its modular survey of work-related accidents and health problems, however, these should be more systematic and should also include information from non-governmental sources.

SDG monitoring also calls for following and assessing perceptions, which are by their very definition subjective. Perceptions change over time, from one country and culture to another, and even within a country. Moreover, they are influenced by the way questions are formulated and the base or benchmark upon which perceptions are measured. Not only do perceptions differ among different social groups, but they may be reported with an element of bias. If this bias remains constant over time, and as long as absolute numbers are not questioned but only the change in direction is monitored, fewer problems would arise in terms of perception monitoring. However, some objections may still arise from using such indicators, for example, confidence in the judicial system and courts, the police and parliament. While non-governmental sources can provide perception surveys more freely than TurkStat, validation of their work by TurkStat may be needed, or at least considered desirable, for these results to be officially accepted. However, TurkStat does not appear interested at present in validating non-governmental generated data.

Issues related to measurement and definitions

Although the level of information on poverty is considered to be 'good' in Turkey, some refinements and further work (which is already underway) would help improve understanding of the actual

situation and provide a better basis for policies and measures. One issue is the use of national absolute poverty lines. When poverty is measured on a nationwide basis, it is only registered in Eastern Turkey. This means that the scale of poverty that does exist in reality in Istanbul and much of Western Turkey is underestimated. One option to resolve this situation could be to establish specific regional absolute poverty lines.

Also in regards to understanding poverty, it is crucial that indicators such as access to health and education be considered in addition to income, so as to provide a multi-dimensional measure of poverty. People living under the national poverty line, as measured by income, can be considered poor despite having easy access to health and education services, while people who do not have access to such services but receive an income above the threshold, are not. Generating a multi-dimensional poverty index is also in line with the essence of the SDGs. Not only does paragraph 17.19 of the 2030 Agenda call for “initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product,” but SDG Target 1.2 refers to reducing “poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.” TurkStat’s work on this issue is at an advanced stage and should be finalised by the time that SDG monitoring commences. Four dimensions are being used in addition to income, namely education, health, housing and labour, which parallels similar work being undertaken in Colombia and Mexico. The recently released ‘Wellbeing Index for the Provinces’ is a formidable and welcome piece of work in this regard (details later).

The existence of legislation is considered to be a useful indicator for various reasons. However, there is no guarantee that such legislation will be effectively implemented, especially given the lack of political will and implementation capacity in countries such as Turkey. For example, in regards to efforts aimed towards achieving a clean environment, the government is rather unwilling to conduct strict inspections, the results of which could be deemed to negatively affect production and economic growth. Only partial and indirect information is available on payments for water usage and wastewater, and fines paid in cases of environmental pollution. Moreover, the application of construction standards and zoning directives is likely to be imperfect. Correcting such shortcomings is more of a governance issue rather than one of statistical improvement – governance should therefore form part of an SDG Monitoring Action Plan. Nevertheless, independent research results and civil society oversight by respected organisations is of particular value and could help prompt governmental action.

In some cases, obtaining SDG-related information requires undertaking a considerable amount of tedious research. For example, if one is looking for imports under preferential schemes, at least two sources need to be reconciled, with TurkStat providing data on imports by country and commodity, and information on import regimes needing to be extracted from other sources. Further, whether the actual imports fall under the preferential schemes also has to be researched separately. This is an area in which systematic data collection should be relatively simple for a government entity and could form part of an SDG Monitoring Action Plan.

There are very few independent organisations directly involved in data generation and the Official Statistics Programme. Indeed, the Hacettepe University Institute of Population Statistics is the only independent institute that populates the Official Statistics Portal. Other bodies include central government, regulatory bodies and semi-official entities such as the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey. The importance of independent sources of data and the added value that they can generate does not seem to be sufficiently appreciated. Increasing the number of independent organisations that generate data should be facilitated and supported by the government. This would provide considerable support to data generation in Turkey without creating an additional financial burden on central government. One option that would ensure that the quality of data generated by these organisations conforms to TurkStat (and therefore international) standards would be to seek TurkStat approval or certification throughout the data generation process, from the sampling stage to the manipulation of raw data and tabulation.

3. Towards an SDG Monitoring Plan: Recent Developments

The discussion in the previous section presented some desirable elements of an eventual action plan targeted towards monitoring the SDGs. TurkStat routinely implements activities and projects aimed at improving its work, some of which can be considered as building blocks for Turkey's SDG monitoring programme. In this section, a brief survey of two such recent activities is presented. The first is the recent release by TurkStat of a new 'Wellbeing Index for the Provinces'. This is indirectly but very closely related to the work on SDG monitoring. The second is Turkey's active participation in UNECE's Conference of European Statisticians and in the UNECE's work on the monitoring of the SDGs in the UNECE region.

The 'Wellbeing Index for the Provinces'

Although not explicitly linked to the SDGs, the 'Wellbeing Index for the Provinces' is closely related to many SDG areas and provides the underpinnings of work in those areas. The index covers 11 dimensions of life: housing, work life, income and wealth, health, education, environment, safety, civic engagement, access to infrastructure services, social life, and life satisfaction, and presents these dimensions, complete with 41 indicators, in a 'single composite index' (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2016). These dimensions of wellbeing are considered to be equally weighted, significant and mutually irreducible. Further, for each dimension, only a few key numbered indicators are selected in an attempt to promote the principles of concentration and functionality (see the list of dimensions and indicators in the Annex 2 of this paper). The index includes indicators that have both a positive and negative effect on wellbeing.

The index usefully provides a geographically-disaggregated picture. Many of the dimension indicators are extremely relevant to the SDGs, with some of them being used here for the first time in a systematic manner. Nevertheless, not all desired indicators were available, even to TurkStat. For water quality, green areas, household financial wealth and physical attacks, proxies had to be used. The index is also a significant step towards increasing the use of administrative data. Education is a case in point, particularly the quality of education. While data on relevant indicators is held in various forms by the Ministry of National Education, this is difficult to obtain. TurkStat has used this data, in particular test results disaggregated according to province, to help measure wellbeing as related to education. Similarly, perception-based indicators, such as job satisfaction and health satisfaction, are also used. Even the percentage of people who feel safe when walking alone at night is used as an indicator. Naturally, scores on such topics depend on the subjective benchmark used by each respondent. However, it is nevertheless crucial that such an index is generated and its results disseminated. An SDG Monitoring Action Plan for Turkey should propose that this be done consistently and continuously so that changes can be measured over time, as part of an important contribution to SDG monitoring. However, while the index is indeed intended to be renewed in three years, renewal may not prove to be simple given that administrators in those provinces that have not scored well have been somewhat critical of the index and the work of TurkStat in this regard.

Further, the index's dimensions and indicators were determined in the light of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 'Better Life Framework', taking into account Turkey's specific context. Many of its considerations reflect characteristics that would also be applicable for measuring SDG indicators. Aside from appropriateness to the main target, these would include being comprehensible, robust and accurate; clearly identifying the direction of contribution (positive/negative); being responsive to and improved by policy change; and being updated periodically. Having a policy sensitive composite index that consists of 'improvable indicators' is especially important in the light of the initial comments of this report referring to the utilisation of hard statistical evidence by policymakers and practitioners. TurkStat intends to conduct inter-institutional and intra-governmental meetings in this area with a view to promoting utilisation for policy design and implementation of the information generated.

Working towards a UNECE Action Plan

TurkStat regards its active participation in UNECE's Conference of European Statisticians and in UNECE's work, as presented in the 'Outline of an Action Plan for the Development of Official Statistics for Monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the UNECE Region' (UNECE, 2015) as the essence of its action plan and as a roadmap for its institutional preparations for SDG monitoring. This regional approach, and the discussions that are at its basis, contain elements that is useful as guidance for individual countries.³

The UNECE Action Plan includes and emphasises numerous issues that are in line with the preceding discussion around Turkey's specific needs. For example, the topic of disaggregation, which is emphasised in the 2030 Agenda and in the discussion on Turkey, prominently features in the UNECE Action Plan, as it recognises the difficulties associated with ensuring sufficient disaggregation (although without, however, providing specific guidance on how to deal with such difficulties). In the comments received from member countries, the need for further resources to produce good quality, in-depth disaggregation of data was highlighted, as well as disaggregation as a very sensitive activity that can raise issues of confidentiality and even legality in some countries. In order to reduce costs, countries could consider producing detailed statistics with lower frequency and different quality labelling, as well as using alternative methods. Further, the importance of using administrative data in statistics has been highlighted, as this can adequately address disaggregation and other data-related issues (paragraph 24).

Also in line with the needs of Turkey and a reasonable work plan, UNECE suggests to group SDG indicators according to whether related data is already produced, can be produced within a medium-term timeframe (up to five years), or requires more than five years for development. It is presumed that a strategy on how to deal with indicators not currently produced will be discussed. Related to this, data that is currently available for SDG monitoring, data that can be derived from existing data, and data that necessitates new data sources and new statistics will be identified (paragraph 18). The UNECE Action Plan also recommends an extensive communication drive through a variety of state-of-the-art mediums, with a wide range of stakeholders, including data users (paragraph 22).

The usefulness of unofficial data also forms a significant element of the UNECE Action Plan, as it calls for the identification of areas where SDG indicators will (continue to) be produced outside official statistics (paragraph 17). This is an area that the official programme of Turkish statistics is currently silent, yet may be prompted to pursue based on the UNECE Action Plan. Further, there are considerable official and unofficial international sources that can be utilised as substitutes for domestic sources when appropriate. However, neither the UNECE Action Plan nor domestic discussions in Turkey are currently dealing with how international sources can be used when national sources are inadequate.

It is not clear what inspiration the Turkish authorities are awaiting from discussions at the UNECE before embarking upon their own action plan. Despite indications from TurkStat that it was waiting for the UNECE Action Plan, it actually seems as though TurkStat itself is more advanced in this regard, with a better considered and more developed action plan than the UNECE. Nevertheless, in order to benefit more from exchanges concerning data in the region, TurkStat representatives have called for "detailed metadata for each indicator [to] be provided beforehand" (paragraph 18).

4. Conclusion

At present, the availability of statistics in Turkey can be considered to be good. Nevertheless, there are some specific areas of improvement to which an action plan aimed principally at SDG monitoring

³In line with the objectives sought in the Post-2015 Data Test Project, the UNECE Action Plan also envisages the "development of an indicator list for [the] UNECE region to complement the global list of indicators (establishing a process and timeline for this) and development of the baselines for targets" (paragraph 11).

should be targeted. These primary areas include improved disaggregation and continuity, as well as the transformation of information and data currently held by diverse parts of governmental bodies into statistics. These issues are common to many countries, particularly those at a similar development level to Turkey. Indeed, these issues are being discussed at various forums, including at the UNECE, at which Turkey is an active participant and expects to benefit further from information exchanges. According to the press releases from TurkStat, the number of areas covered by TurkStat's work is increasing, with some aspects of the 2030 Agenda becoming increasingly prominent.⁴ Moreover, some new data releases from TurkStat, particularly the 'Wellbeing Index for the Provinces', are closely related to SDG monitoring. It appears that TurkStat is successfully testing the ground in this area, and can therefore be considered to have the ingredients necessary for an action plan suited to SDG monitoring.

However, one final issue remains. Despite the increasing availability of statistics, most references to the work of TurkStat can be found on the internet, rather than in print, on the radio or on the television. This most likely reflects the Turkish public's unfortunate disinterest in statistics and hard facts, which demands a cultural change to rectify. Moreover, most of the references that did appear in written or visual media focused on issues concerning inflation, foreign trade and employment, rather than those issues relevant to the sustainability of development. This therefore indicates an important need to educate the public and policymakers on the importance of using statistics and hard facts.

⁴<http://www.TurkStat.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=21825>

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ANNEXES

Annex 1: Action Plan Matrix for Monitoring SDGs in Turkey

Issue	Action	Responsibility
Access to data	Priority list of administrative data to be transformed to statistical information, with time target	Experts with TurkStat in lead
	Information on preferential trade to be made available	Ministry of Customs and Trade
Inter-agency coordination	TurkStat's staff should provide training for personnel in other governmental entities	TurkStat
	Indication of new financial needs of TurkStat arising from new coordination responsibilities	TurkStat
Coherence/ methodology	Classification of provinces as rural or urban according to proxies determined by expert review	Academia and TurkStat
	Harmonising regional definitions and other geographical classifications including rural and urban areas used by governmental entities	All governmental entities, TurkStat in lead
Disaggregation	Access to microdata to be made freer, particularly for researchers	All governmental entities
	The Wellbeing Index should be done consistently and continuously	TurkStat
Data quality	Ensure continuity in data series	TurkStat and others
	Expedite the refinement of poverty measures	TurkStat and experts
	Campaign to improve response rate to surveys	Government
	Identification of survey questions to be revised with priority before SDG monitoring begins	TurkStat and experts
Public-private coordination	Provide incentives for turning selected irregularly conducted studies into more regular publications	Government and experts
	Encourage the generation of useful unofficial or semi-official data	Research institutes, semi-official entities
	Encourage provision of resources for non-governmental data generation	TUBITAK
	TurkStat to reconsider its reticence for overseeing and validating non-governmental data generation	TurkStat
	Convene a consultative group to prepare a selective 'wish list' of priority research topics focused on SDG monitoring	Experts, TUBITAK to consider funding favourably
	Encourage actively, the early implementation and satisfactory progress of Action Plan, particularly the proposal by Denmark on administrative data	Ministry of Development

Source: Author's elaboration.

Annex 2: Wellbeing Index for the Provinces: Dimensions and Indicators

a. Housing

- i. Number of rooms per person
- ii. Percentage of toilets in dwellings
- iii. Percentage of households with problems concerning quality of dwellings

b. Work life

- i. Employment rate
- ii. Unemployment rate
- iii. Average daily earnings
- iv. Job satisfaction rate

c. Income and wealth

- i. Savings deposit per capita
- ii. Percentage of households in middle or higher income groups
- iii. Percentage of households failing to meet basic needs

d. Health

- i. Infant mortality rate
- ii. Life expectancy at birth
- iii. Number of applications per doctor
- iv. Health status satisfaction rate
- v. Public health services satisfaction rate

e. Education

- i. Net schooling ratio of pre-primary education between the ages of three and five years
- ii. Average points of placement basic scores for transition from basic to secondary education
- iii. Average points for transition to higher education examination
- iv. Percentage of higher education graduates
- v. Public education services satisfaction rate

f. Environment

- i. Average PM10 station values (air pollution)
- ii. Percentage of forest area per km²
- iii. Percentage of population receiving waste services
- iv. Percentage of households with street noise issues
- v. Municipal cleaning services satisfaction rate

g. Safety

- i. Murder rate (per million people)
- ii. Number of traffic accidents involving death or injury (per thousand people)
- iii. Percentage of people who feel safe when walking alone at night
- iv. Public safety services satisfaction rate

h. Civic engagement

- i. Voter turnout at local administration elections
- ii. Rate of political party membership
- iii. Percentage of persons interested in activities of associations/labour unions

i. Access to infrastructure services

- i. Number of internet subscriptions (per hundred people)
- ii. Access rate to sewerage and pipe system
- iii. Access rate to airport
- iv. Municipal public transport services satisfaction rate

j. Social life

- i. Cinema and theatre audience levels (per hundred people)
- ii. Shopping mall area (per thousand people)
- iii. Social relations satisfaction rate
- iv. Social life satisfaction rate

k. Life satisfaction

- i. Happiness level



Launched in 2012, **Southern Voice on Post-MDG International Development Goals** (*Southern Voice*) is a network of 49 think tanks from Africa, Asia and Latin America, which was set up to serve as an open platform to contribute to the global discourse pertaining to the formation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the challenges of implementation, monitoring and mid-course review of the SDGs. *Southern Voice* addresses the existing 'knowledge asymmetry' in the global debates and 'participation deficit' of the developing countries by generating evidence-based knowledge, sharing policy experiences originating in the Global South, and disseminating this knowledge and experience among key stakeholders. *Southern Voice Occasional Papers* are based on research undertaken by members of the network as well as inputs received at various platforms of the initiative. The *Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)*, Bangladesh hosts the Secretariat of *Southern Voice*.



Website: www.southernvoice.org
E-mail: info@southernvoice.org

Secretariat:



Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)

House - 6/2 (7th & 8th floors), Block - F
Kazi Nazrul Islam Road, Lalmatia Housing Estate
Dhaka - 1207, Bangladesh
Telephone: (+88 02) 9141734, 9141703, 9126402, 9143326 & 8124770
Fax: (+88 02) 8130951; E-mail: info@cpd.org.bd
Website: www.cpd.org.bd