

Reflection paper: criteria for selecting respectively assessing indicators

Below we provide two exemplary sets of criteria/aspects which could be considered when selecting respectively assessing the quality of indicators.

1. ESPON

ESPON Policy Brief: Indicators for integrated territorial and urban development, April 2018

Three criteria can help in choosing the indicators:

- Communication power: does the indicator communicate to a broad and diverse audience?
- Proxy power: is the indicator representative and does the indicator come in “herds”? Similar indicators which capture roughly the same meaning might be used as a substitute in the event of data problems.
- Data power: are there timely and reliable data?

2. UNSTAT

Discussion paper on principles of using quantification to operationalize the SDGs and criteria for indicators selection for the Expert Group Meeting on the indicator framework for the post-2015 development agenda, New York - 25-26 February 2015

These considerations have referred to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicators developed and proposed in the framework of the United Nations (UN) – it provides a sound summary of the main criteria to be taken into account when developing / selecting / assessing indicators:

Relevant

1. Linked to the target: The indicator should be clearly linked to one or more targets and provide robust measures of progress towards the target(s).
2. Policy relevant: The indicator should be relevant to policy formulation and provide enough information for policy making. It should also be sensitive and responsive to policy interventions and other underlying causes of change at the appropriate level (it could be global, regional, national, and local).
3. Applicable at the appropriate level: For global monitoring, the indicator should be relevant to all countries. For national monitoring, the indicator should be relevant to national priorities.

Methodologically sound

1. **Based on sound methodology**: The indicator should be scientifically robust and based, to the greatest extent possible, on existing internationally agreed definitions, classifications, standards, recommendations and best practices. The methodology behind the indicator (data sources, method of computation, treatment of missing values, regional estimates, etc.) should be well documented and readily available.
2. **Tested to be valuable**: Empirical analysis showing the indicator is valuable has been undertaken and results have been documented. The indicator should be recommended by a well-established and recognized peer review mechanism or through international mechanisms. For new indicators, pilot projects are needed and must be supported with necessary resources to test the indicators and data collection methods and the results need to be fully documented.
3. **Coherent and complementary**: The indicator should be consistent with and complementary to other indicators in the monitoring framework. It will be useful to develop an inter-dependency map to show the information required and the relationship between the indicators.

Measurable

1. **Stable and sustainable**: The indicator should be measured in a cost-effective and practical manner by countries. A regular and timely data collection mechanism has been or can be developed with reasonable costs and effort. To the greatest extent possible, indicators should be constructed from well-established sources of public and private data. The statistical capacity or potential capacity for data collection and analysis to support the indicator must exist at national and international levels.
2. **Disaggregated**: It should be possible to disaggregate the indicator by geographical region, sex, income, or special population groups where applicable and relevant.
3. **Managed by one or more responsible agencies**: There is one or more designated lead responsible agencies for timely and high quality reporting of the indicator and for undertaking the related analysis. At the international level, there should be an agency or agencies responsible for the production of country-level data, regional aggregates, development and dissemination of concepts, methods and analysis used, describing the assessment of progress made globally and by regions. In addition, the agency should provide guidance and/or assistance to countries to strengthen their capacity to produce the indicators.

Easy to communicate and access

1. **Easy to interpret and communicate:** The indicator is clear and easy to understand for policy makers, the general public and other stakeholders, and unambiguous for interpreting. Use of language and terminology and the presentation of information should be carefully considered. In some cases where scientific concepts and terminology have to be used, statistical training should be provided to policy makers and the general public.
2. **Easily accessible:** The indicator should be easily and openly accessible to the general public, policy makers and other stakeholders.

Limited in number and outcome focused

1. **Limited in number:** One of the main strengths of the MDGs was their focus on a limited number of indicators, which made the framework clear and manageable. A long list of indicators is neither communicable nor effective in galvanizing public support. The number of indicators at the global level should be minimal. At the national level, supplemental indicators can be added according to national priorities and circumstances to address their specific needs.
2. **Outcome focused:** When possible, indicators should be mainly outcome focused. In the absence of reliable outcome indicators, process or input indicators can be used.