Visibility of indigenous peoples in sustainable development indicators

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the need for an International statistical effort to include Indigenous peoples in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in national statistics is outlined.
The current involvement of Indigenous peoples in the SDGs is noted and some of the shortcomings in recent reporting on progress towards meeting the goals is highlighted.
A proposal for the IAOS involvement in working towards engaging the UN Statistical Commission is presented. It outlines the political, technical, financial and capacity issues thant needs to be addressed with a timeline for progress.

INTRODUCTION

The UN adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015.

In 2015, the UN Statistical Commission established the Inter-Agency and Expert Group (IAEG) on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators to develop and implement the SDG global indicator framework. The IAEG developed a set of indicators [1] which has been adopted by the UN General Assembly in July 2017 (decision 71/313), based on the recommendation of the 2017 meeting of the UN Statistical Commission.

The list of indicators is prefaced as follows:

> Sustainable Development Goal indicators should be disaggregated, where relevant, by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability and geographic location, or other characteristics, in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

Inclusion/Exclusion of Indigenous People in SDG indicators

Despite the inclusion of ethnicity as a disaggregation variable, there is little mention of ethnicity in the SDG goals or indicators. Of the 169 goals, only four include ethnicity or Indigenous status:

- Goal 2.3 'By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, **indigenous** peoples, … Indicator 2.3.2 is 'Average income of small-scale food producers, by sex and **indigenous** status.'
- Goal 4.5 'By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, **indigenous** peoples and children in vulnerable situations'. Indicator 4.5.1 is 'Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, **indigenous** peoples and conflict-affected, **as data become available**) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated.'
- Goal 10.2 'By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, **ethnicity**, origin, religion or economic or other status'. Indicator 10.2.1 is 'Proportion of people living below 50 per cent of median income, by sex, age and persons with disabilities'. The indicator does not refer to ethnicity.
- Goal 17.18 'By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries … to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, **ethnicity**, migratory status, disability, …'. Indicator 17.18.1 is 'Proportion of sustainable development indicators produced at the national level with full disaggregation when relevant to the target, in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.'

The lack of attention to Indigenous status is surprising given the acknowledged disadvantage that Indigenous peoples face across the world. The 2009 and 2015 United Nations Reports 'State of the World's Indigenous Peoples' [2, 3] reported available national data on the extreme disadvantage of a range of Indigenous people, as well as describing the resilience of Indigenous peoples and their long struggle for recognition, including in international forums.

Madden et al [4] have described the multiple calls through the UN system for action on Indigenous statistics. Specifically, in 2014, the UN General Assembly adopted the report of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples [5]. Article 10 of that document states: 'We commit ourselves to working with indigenous peoples to disaggregate data, as appropriate, or conduct surveys and to utilizing holistic indicators of indigenous peoples' well-being to address the situation and needs of indigenous peoples and individuals, in particular older persons, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities.'

There is no record that this matter was brought to the attention of the UN Statistical Commission. It appears that the Commission has never considered Indigenous statistical issues, even though it addresses a wide range of economic and social statistical topics. The Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data mentions disaggregated data but no mention is made how data is to be disaggregated. [6]

Indigenous people have been seeking specific consideration in the development of SDG indicators. In 2015, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues recommended that 'the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators and the United Nations Statistical Commission actively engage with indigenous peoples in developing key indicators relating to indigenous peoples' rights to their lands, territories and resources, free, prior and informed consent, empowerment of indigenous women, access to justice and special measures addressing the particular circumstances of indigenous peoples regarding relevant health, education and socioeconomic development targets of the 17 goals' [7].

This has been followed up by the UN Sustainable Development Major Group on Indigenous Peoples with specific proposals for indicators relevant to Indigenous peoples [8]. The Group noted 'with concern that many references to "indigenous peoples" were deleted in the final Outcome Document of the Open-ended Working Group on the SDGs (OWG) to be considered for adoption by the UN General Assembly. The near "invisibility" of indigenous peoples in the current draft of the SDGs poses a serious risk of repeating their negative experiences with national development processes and efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as well as further marginalization in the Post-2015 Development Agenda'.

The Major Group made many recommendations concerning a range of indicators, grouped under the headings:

> Lands, territories and resources
>
> Free Prior and Informed Consent for development projects occurring on indigenous lands
>
> Special Measures to address indigenous peoples' distinct needs
>
> Access to justice and redress mechanisms
>
> Participation and representation in decision-making and relevant bodies.

To examine disaggregation issues, the IAEG established a working group on data disaggregation. It advised the 2017 meeting of the Statistical Commission that 'Activities (of the workstream) will include reviewing each type of disaggregation (including by sex, age, location, income or other characteristics) and working to harmonize the categories of disaggregation across the indicator framework.[9]

Indigenous status is not being specifically addressed. At the April 2018 of the IAEG, the working group on disaggregation reported that 'As disaggregation dimensions stated in the Agenda 2030 are not yet available for all indicators, a first step to achieving full disaggregation is to propose and develop a **minimum** disaggregation for each indicator'. [10] There is no indication that this minimum will include Indigenous status, and there has been no acknowledgment of the recommendations concerning SDG indicators made by the UN Sustainable Development Major Group on Indigenous Peoples.

Usefully, the working group identified four issues to be considered in approaching disaggregation: Political, Technical, Financial and Capacity.

In the absence of Indigenous disaggregation, misleading reporting is occurring. For example, in Australia, the 2016 SDG's dashboard report suggests that three of the main goals have been met: [11]

Goal 3 Good Health and Wellbeing, Goal 6 Clean water and sanitation and Goal 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities.

Concentrating on one part of Goal 3, 3.3 states : 'By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases'. In reality, Indigenous people in Australia have much higher rates of HIV infection (twice the rate) [12] tuberculous (6 times higher [13]) and other sexually transmitted diseases (nearly 7 times higher) [14] than non-Indigenous Australians.

Canada is also set to meet goal 3 according to the 2016 dashboard but has similar issues to Australia for its First Nations people with HIV infection in Saskatchewan province 11 times the national average [15]and rates of tuberculosis amongst First Nations and Inuit 20 to 30 times higher than for Canadian born non-Indigenous Canadians [16].

2.THE PATH FORWARD

The development of SDG indicators, and the work to date on their implementation, include little mention of Indigenous peoples. This is in spite of the strong calls by various international groups representing Indigenous peoples for the development of Indigenous peoples to be included and recognised in the SDG process.

This lack of interaction mirrors the lack of action to date by the international statistical community and many national statistics agencies to address the repeated calls for development of statistics on Indigenous peoples. Without reliable information on the economic and social condition of Indigenous peoples, they can easily be ignored in national policy making, their substantial resourcing needs overlooked and discrimination disregarded.

To bridge the gap between Indigenous peoples and the international statistical community, a new initiative is needed to establish a dialogue including Indigenous advocates for international statistical effort and official statisticians.

The International Association for Official Statistics (IAOS) can act to put this dialogue in place. The aim should be to consider the various recommendations for international statistical effort to improve Indigenous statistics and to bring forward proposals to go to the UN Statistical Commission to establish the necessary work program.

Suggested tasks to be considered are grouped using the four headings identified by the SGD disaggregation group:

Political

Identify political and legislative obstacles to collection of statistics on Indigenous peoples, and propose paths to remove them.

Propose statistical methods for identifying Indigenous peoples in statistical collections (census, surveys and administrative data) to meet the expectations of Indigenous peoples.

Develop an approach to data custodianship that respects Indigenous approaches to data custodianship, analysis and publication while assisting statisticians to report the situation of Indigenous peoples as effectively as possible.

Technical

Identify approaches to ensure the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in national data collections.

Develop and evaluate acceptable methods to identify Indigenous people, and to respond to variations in identification across time, age groups and geography.

Cultural appropriateness and relevance of national statistical data collections, analysis and reporting.

Financial and Capacity

Identify and advocate for a fair share of national statistical resources and skills to be devoted to statistics on Indigenous peoples.

Use international statistical forums to share knowledge across countries to identify and use best practice and to avoid duplication.

Encourage the recruitment, training and retention of Indigenous people within national statistical agencies.

Timing

The SDG agenda focused on 2030 increases the urgency to improve Indigenous statistics.

The following timetable is proposed:

2018   IAOS establishes Indigenous statistics working group, including adequate representation of interested international Indigenous bodies

2019   Working group takes stock of calls for Indigenous statistical development and addresses the range of issues including those outlined here

2019   Working group engages with SDG IAEG and its Disaggregation working group

2019   Report from the working group presented to and discussed at the 2019 ISI World Statistics congress in Kuala Lumpur, to confirm next steps

2020   Working group develops reports to UN Statistical Commission, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous peoples and other international Indigenous groups

2020   Session at IAOS Conference to finalise reports and consider next steps

2021   Agenda item and possible side session on Indigenous statistics at UN Statistics Commission.

Identification of resources to support the working group needs to be pursued as a matter of urgency.

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