Monitoring of SDG Implementation

Infrastructure and Methodology – Proposal for Action

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CONTEXT OF THIS CONTRIBUTION

Discussions and reviews of Monitoring and Evaluation (M & E) have been of key importance for post 2015 SDG accountability discussions. M&E are considered fundamental governance mechanisms necessary to inform the policy makers and the public on progress and impact of implementing the SDGs. Although most often conflated to "M&E", monitoring and evaluation are two separate analytic functions essential to the management of any development programme or project.

Monitoring is an ongoing process that parallels, tracks and traces day-to-day decisions and actions. Evaluation is an end of the pipe activity seeking to assess and judge against set criteria, the validity of any decision or action. With respect to the SDG's, the authors propose to use multiple data sources for both monitoring and evaluative processes, to integrate the use of new ICT methods and tools with the implementation of the SDG's and to augment "data analysis" through a reform of the statistical capacity of the global institutions as well as that of the national authorities. Most fundamental of all, the authors stress the need for a "common" communication template so that data can be compared across national and sub-national boundaries.

In the context of this paper, and in view of current discussions, the conflation of "M&E" for the SDG's may hinder the pragmatic discussions that are needed to "design and build" a viable monitoring and accountability process. Thus this paper focuses on the need for an SDG **monitoring system** to be fully developed and operationalized. As part of the ongoing SDG discussion, both "monitoring" and "evaluation" processes need to be re-assessed as innovations in data collection techniques, analytic tools and data storage continue to evolve. The same is true concerning citizen expectations on transparency and democratic participation.

FRAMING THE ISSUE

The SDGs seek to have people understand the world in fundamentally new ways. The SDGs calls for people to work together to bridge the complex differences that define human lives. Thus the call for strong monitoring and accountability is about the sustainability, scalability and impact of development work.

An up to date information collection, analysis and dissemination infrastructure needs to be part of the SDG monitoring approach in every country. Reasons are clear for fully operationalized such a robust and transparent monitoring system.

Premises and Rationale:

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1. Higher order intent of monitoring supports and catalyses an institutional learning process in all countries, whether developed or developing.
2. Monitoring the implementation of activities to support the SDGs is not an extension of fiduciary control but rather an essential management tool for organizing and managing the SDG implementation process
3. In light of the institutional complexity of SDG alignments, a wide range of governmental, private, and non-governmental national-level actors need to have the authority and reliable information to shape, reframe and reconcile the competing sets of SDG priorities and objectives. An effective monitoring system helps them to achieve this.
4. Accountability requires verifiable goals and clear measures of outputs and results over time. Additionally, accountability is needed on commitments to action and promised investments that are made by various stakeholders. Monitoring means constant and consistent data collection based on participation of state and non-state actors allows for the realistic assessment of progress and for reorganisation of SDG implementation whenever necessary.
5. Targeting the most vulnerable populations and assuring equity of access when making development investment decisions, such as in education, health, public transport is possible if a monitoring system provides the essential data. Policy implementation might inadvertently overlook the special needs of different groups and different communities when data is scanty, hard to come by and behind times.
6. Monitoring stops the blaming game of "who caused non-conformance of SDG implementation" by rather building in situ capacities that ensure local and national level stakeholders can focus on truly designing and managing the processes of SDG implementation.
7. Achieving transparency in terms of policy decisions through monitoring in the context of development cooperation is to verify the compliance with the Principles of Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action.
8. Thanks to monitoring, forestalling becomes possible of the short-termism induced by a results based management (RBM) approach and results based development financing that leads to short-term and opportunistic undertaking at the expense of deeper rooted and longer term programming and undertaking.

CALL TO ACTION: SUPPORTING EVIDENCE FOR AN INNOVATIVE AND RESPONSIVE MONITORING INFRASTRUCTURE

Findings summarised in the "A Million Voices: the World that We Want. A Sustainable Future with Dignity for All"[2] (2013) supports the proposal for a standalone Monitoring Framework that will give guidance to the on-going data collection and transparent reporting.

[2] United Nations Development Group. Accessible at http://www.worldwewant2015.org/bitcache/cb02253d47a0f7d4318f41a4d11c330229991089?vid=422422&disposition=inline&op=view

"In many countries people are already involved in shaping new solutions —governments at all levels are engaging the public in finding solutions to natural resource preservation, innovative energy sources and monitoring public service quality. These efforts all form part of a complex dialogue that is generating the best ideas and building consensus on the post-2015agenda: the World We Want." (p.7)

"DATA CONCERNS. It has been seen that the consultations call loudly and clearly for more accountable and responsive governance, and to leave no one behind. It is also recognized that, to ensure accountability and tackle inequalities, more data, better data, new types of data and more accessible data are needed. The need for a data revolution has been repeated several times. In the interests of ensuring a universal human-rights-based approach, there is a clear agreement that there should no longer be a focus on just national aggregates, but on disaggregated data — by income quintile, geographic region, sex, and by relevant social groups, particularly those most excluded. As discussed above, the focus on aggregate indicators diverts attention from the most disadvantaged and marginalized, who continue to be 'left behind'. (P.40)

As often said, "all development is local". Monitoring and corresponding data generation and collection need to reflect this operational demand and "user" concerns when services are provided and sustainable development goals are arbitraged and priorities are set. The monitoring effort and data transparency need to reflect the commitment of not leaving the marginalised, invisible and voiceless population behind. An "outer space" (expert driven-macro data) perspective of global monitoring offers little to the local administrations and concerned actors except shame and blame.

INTEGRATIVE THINKING: FROM "SDG'S AND TECHNOLOGY" TO "SDG'S ARE TECHNOLOGY"

The growing conversation and increased call by people to "work together' and for "greater participation" need to be headed. How can this collaboration at multiple scale be achieved? How can we create the means to fully incorporate the voices of the billions of humans who populate this planet? How can we truly act on the idea that "global problems can best be solved by thousands, even millions, of people working together"? How can national institutions and frontline service delivery agents absorb this multitude of ideas and make best use?

Given operational question such as these, and the inherent complexity of the SDG's, analysts, policy makers and activists have to be realistic and use the practical tools that are now available to gather the real-time data required to implement projects, monitor progress, assess impact, identify false assumptions and mitigate gaps.

With the evolution of ICT, "new" SDG monitoring processes can combine computer science, information systems, development studies **and** system thinking. A new SDG monitoring process would move from assessing if "needs" – often defined by people outside of affected communities --- have been "met" to a process where the real internal "wants" of a community takes precedence. A new SDG monitoring process would not only capture the state of the affairs at different time and space, but also record how things have been done, where they have been done and why they have been done. Such institutional memory will lend a managerial view to the situation if it would be found wanting.

Mobile technology and the proliferation of smart phones, even in poorest regions, allow citizens to feed in information about the current situational data regarding everything from health, education, roads, water, disease, medical supplies, etc. Data essential for basic survival and wellbeing of the people is now available at any time. If there is a common template and standard for working with this kind of data, then citizen reporting can be harnessed also for collective action and form pivotal feedback signals to the institutions

which are expected to delivery development results. Internal "memory" could also provide an avenue for investigation for trouble shooting if and when there is negative feedback coming from any specific group or place.

While citizens are empowered to engage in multistakeholder dialogue, paradoxically, it will be institutions' capacity or lack of capacity to validate, to "in-source", to analyse and to act that might be a bottle neck. Results of the MDGs speak volume of this disparity and under addressed failure of weak institutions or simply non-existing institutions in many parts of the world. While the global community is committed to leave no group behind, overlooking this institutional bottleneck which global monitoring of development results reveals will just continue to exasperate the "development orphan state" phenomenon. A national centred monitoring framework would complement and strengthen the global monitoring and result in positive reporting effects that ensure that no country would be left behind.

Complexity and a new vocabulary: Designing an SDG "Monitoring Standard" for Accountability

Using contemporary ICT techniques and tools for monitoring and accountability is about reframing development. Where early ICT had a supply-driven focus that often marginalized communities of poverty, contemporary ICT models seek to centralize communities and create a demand-driven focus. Where early ICT re-enforced a "top down" model – characterised by a view of largely passive "consumers", ICT can now support the marginalized as active producers and active innovators to move out deprivation and entrapment.

While the technology and tools are available, a shared template in the form of a "Monitoring Standard" is still necessary. This template would set guidelines on what procedures to be tracked, what evidence to be collected at what interval and which stakeholders or actors are engaged in the process. It will also be explicit with reporting in terms of context and format. In view of the divergent country circumstances, this standard will not force rigid compliance, instead it is a management instrument to be adopted, moulded and further developed in order to fit local context and reality.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ACTION

What does this mean for our call for making the implementation of the SDG's fully accountable? It means to have in place monitoring systems with an inclusive process. New voices can be heard, new insights attained and greater participation supported. It means that monitoring is also an empowering process which supports good governance through consensus building and transparent information sharing.

With the use of a coding standard, datasets can more easily be integrated and compared and links between such issues as climate change adaptation needs, water contamination, communicable diseases, transport, draught and poor agricultural production, and food security can now be seen in real time. Gaps and overlaps in resource flow can be fully monitored. To achieve all of this people, organizations and countries need the skills to:

- Link organizational structures, institutional processes and administrative procedures with clear lines of authority, legitimacy, accountability, responsibility;
- Develop and implement an international standard and language so data can be linked to increase collaboration and co-ordination of related work efforts;
- Increase collaborative skill sets and cooperative management competencies

If we want to monitor how organizations will collaborate to implement the SDG's, the example below illustrates institutional coordination and collaboration for arresting climate change.

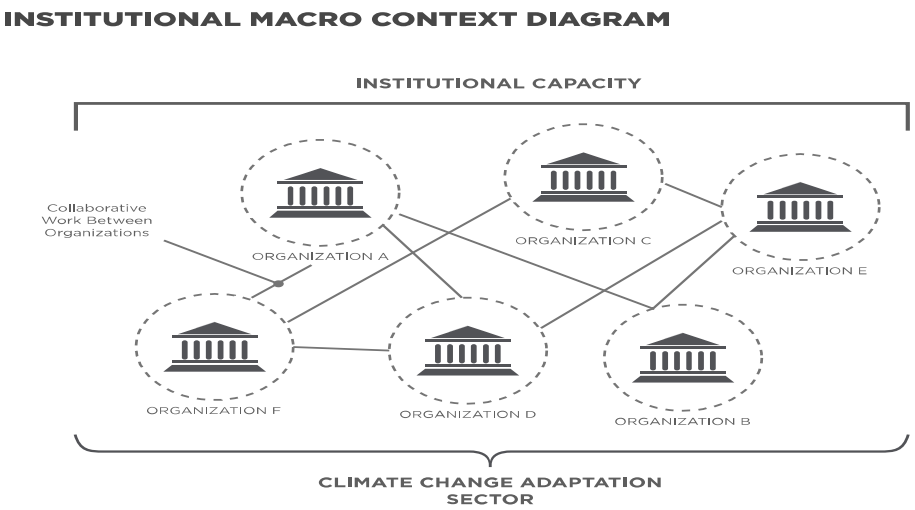

Figure 1 (source : Jerri Husch, 2013)

Seeing in this institutional complexity, the need to support a new set of skills, to create a shared language and to monitor the process become apparent. Evidence will be collected to support collaboration and to identify silos and disconnect.

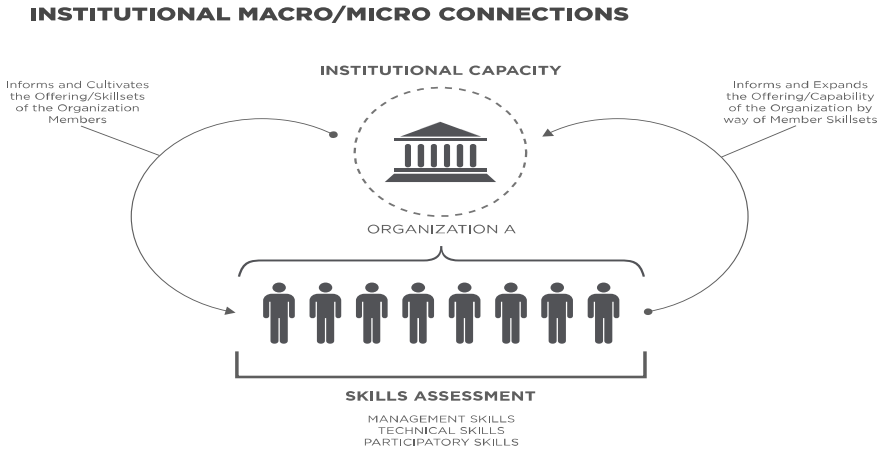

Figure 2 (Source : Jerri Husch, 2013)

PROPOSAL FOR ACTIONS

Below is a set of actions that build into a coherent response the need for an inclusive monitoring approach and architecture.

Action #1: Path Finding and Demonstration Countries to Launch the Global SDG Data Hubs

At this juncture, there is a readiness to move to the next level of action. Stakeholders in early action countries are considering ways to move forward to build a multi-stakeholder coalitions to support the implementation of the SDG framework, including multi-stakeholder monitoring, evaluation, and accountability mechanisms. National and international partners need to collaborate to establish a data driven SDG platform in early action countries. SDG data hubs would be expected to enhance aggregation, curation and visualization of critical data. The SDG data platform could be designed to ensure:

- authentic and robust multi-stakeholder engagement;
- that stakeholders make "commitments to action" on a periodic basis,
- unified data-driven monitoring and accountability hub,
- that broad-based youth & citizen engagement is enabled, and finally,
- accountability positively incentivizes bolder and faster action and impact.

Action #2: Deploying appropriate and state of the art technologies, techniques and tools
clearly it is time for increased leveraging of mobile & web-based applications, participatory maps & crowd sourced event data, aerial & satellite imagery, geospatial platforms, advanced visualization, live simulation, and computational & statistical models to power effective monitoring of SDG related activities. New technologies now offer more relevant and rapid responses to an increasingly complex development agenda.

Increased use of appropriate technologies will create an understanding that to achieve the new SDG's, nations cannot rely on a single organization or institution to bring together the diverse SDG actors with very different goals, aims, strengths, interests, and backgrounds. Such an attempt would be slow and costly. Rather by accessing and using these new "linking technologies", networks of interested parties, collaborative efforts of stakeholders and alliances of communities, will create a new basis for conversation, information sharing and action.

The rise of handheld GPS units, Google Maps, and OpenStreetMap for example, assisted in the early development of "crisis maps", as crowd-sourced data and new users began to make conflict maps for themselves.[3] Over the past few years the world has learned they can share their story about what is happening to them in real time through SMS, Twitter, and other social media. Other examples and niche tools abound.

Action #3: Linking existing datasets
Over time, and with appropriate governance, open-sourced data that are generated from multiple sources and at multiple levels of operation can be fully linked: from the local/city level, to country level, to regional level, and ultimately to the global level. Data platforms and standards are needed that ensure inter-operability of both quantitative and qualitative data from multiple sources and institutions across the SDG agenda. A unified hub of static and dynamic data can be created that layers major categories of data needed are:

- global reporting systems and surveys;
- country reporting systems and surveys;
- open data from governments, the private sector, and institutions on "commitments to action";
- dynamic social data;
- citizen-generated data;
- environmental and geospatial data;
- global indices, such as the Human Development Index, the Open Budget Index, etc.; and
- private corporate datasets connected to MNCs' social responsibility and global compact programme.

Action # 4: Shared Communication and Data Collective Template: A Monitoring Standard
Based on the best cases and lessons learnt from different sectors, a standard reference template needs to be developed. For monitoring and cross-sector data integration and analysis, as well as "cross-practice" collaboration, there needs to be a conversation and deliberation focused on the creation, dissemination and use of a standard data coding processes. To begin to share and integrate data---to communicate---agreement on a "vocabulary" is essential. Datasets derived from across the global spectrum of key actors, including national ministries, NGO's and commercial entities need to be comparable. The reason a standard

[3] http://crisismappers.net

is needed is that different local, national, regional and global actors, mandated to collaborate on SDG related issues, *have no common tool or standard to share data. There is no commonly agreed upon mechanism to bring all the diverse datasets together*.

We need a dynamic and adaptable standard coding process. This first step to data integration, including the ability to integrate *qualitative* and *quantitative* data, will offer a new way to make sense of data from diverse sectors, sources and time periods

UNDP in their "MDG Monitor Project" (2009) began this "standard" design process which was augmented by pilot national programmes. Now a standard monitoring language, for example, has been used to integrate diverse datasets to monitor climate change adaptation projects and link with development goals in eight national contexts in Africa. This on-going work can be further supported and disseminated.

Ingredients of a Monitoring Standard[4]
The proposed monitoring standard could encompass the following ingredients:

1. Data Definition that is based on stakeholder participation to ensure inclusive policy priorities and criteria.
2. Data collection and dissemination procedures for tracking the entire SDG implementation process.
3. Reporting format for collecting, sorting, storing and retrieving data for statistical analysis.
4. Participatory approach to micro-foundational monitoring in order to capture the sub-national diversity and disparities in terms of multidimensional poverty and varied pathways in attaining sustainable development.
5. Visualisation at subnational level for whole system mapping and "at-a-glance" reporting for easy comprehension and priority setting
6. Periods for management review against agreed evaluation criteria.

These ingredients should be streamlined into a monitoring architecture in order to capture the practice and progress of SDG implementation at two levels: global and national. A preliminary sketch of such a monitoring architecture are illustrated below.

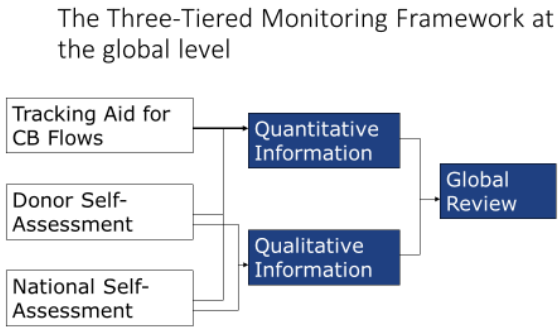

Figure 3: The Global Architecture for Monitoring

(Source: adopted from presentation of Dr Lichia Yiu, CSEND, on "More Enabling, Less Controlling", UNFCCC Meeting on Experiences with Performance Indicators for Monitoring & Evaluation of Capacity -Building in Developing Countries, Rio de Janeiro, 6-7 November 2008)

[4] For detailed discussion, see « An Evidence-Based Monitoring System for an Effective Aid for Trade", Lichia Yiu & Raymond Saner, in *Trade Negotiations Insights,* vol. 10 (1), February 2011. Accessible at http://www.csend.org/images/articles/files/20110420-TNI_article_on_Evidence_Based_Monitoring_System_Feb_111.pdf

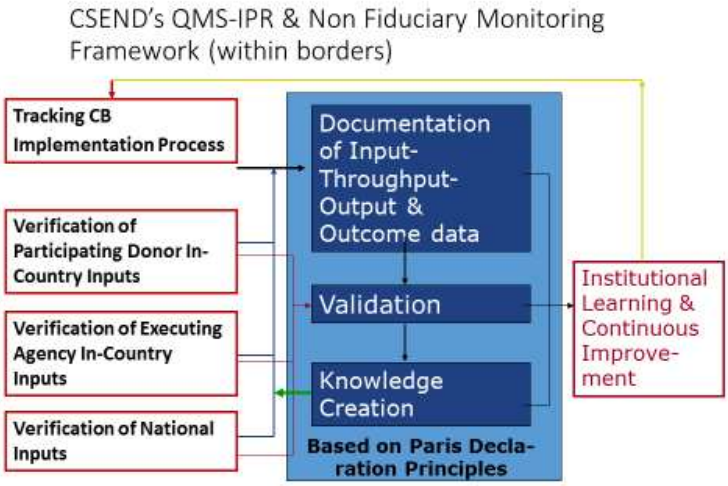

Figure 4: The National Architecture for Monitoring
(Source: see Figure 3)

CONCLUSION

To implement the SDGs, comprehensive and differentiated data collection is needed that reflects the operational realities at different levels of each country. Such detailed data can support a country's managerial decision making and monitoring of operational progress towards the SDGs at all levels, i.e., national, regional, and subnational levels. New analytic tools can disaggregate enormous amounts of diverse data to offer both "broad" and "granular" views of the social landscape and offer a more realistic context to a country's SDG challenges. Situational and institutional complexities can be captured, offering policy and decision makers fully relevant and grounded information. From smart phones to the cloud, innovation in ICT allows for data collection and dissemination to be dynamic, immediate and participatory (horizontal).[5] 21st century development efforts through the integration of appropriate ICT to aggregate, curate, and visualize data can be the foundation of a dynamic and relevant SDG implementation.

A dynamic SDG monitoring system can be a basic policy management tool to support accountability and transparency across complex governance structures. An integrated SDG monitoring process would support continues reporting of data at all levels, provide a means to assess and adjust the quality and impact of policy choices, and create "on time" operational scenarios and strategies to help countries trace *and track current implementation of* their SDGs. Finally, a relevant and logical monitoring system, integrated across all stakeholders would be a process that empowers all stakeholders (state and non-state actors) to participate and to contribute to the realisation of their country's SDGs.

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[5] ICT4D 2016: New Priorities for ICT4D Policy, Practice and WSIS in a Post-2015 World, Richard Heeks, University of Manchester http://www.seed.manchester.ac.uk/subjects/idpm/research/publications/wp/di/di-wp59/ retrieved 25/06/2014

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