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Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2015

Sustainable Development Goal 17

Strengthening data and statistics to support monitoring

Recognizing the high level of ambition of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[1], governments also commit to comparably ambitious implantation targets under each of Goals 1-16. Goal 17 of the new Agenda further specifies 19 targets on the means of implementation and a revitalized global partnership for sustainable development to ensure the achievement of the economic, social and environmental development. Specifically, the 19 targets under Goal 17 concern development financing; technology; capacity building; trade; policy and institutional coherence; multi-stakeholder partnerships; and data, monitoring and accountability.

This chapter focuses on data and statistics. High-quality data and statistics that are disaggregated by relevant population groups are essential for key stakeholders to make effective decisions. Such data and statistics are needed if the 2030 Agenda is to be achieved, including ensuring that "no one is left behind" in the development process. United Nations Member States have committed to engage in systematic follow-up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at national, regional and global levels in fulfilment of their accountability to citizens. Indicators, underpinned by high quality data and statistics, will be integral to the follow-up and review process.

The analysis of data issues presented for SDGs 1 to 16 highlights some of the data coverage and measurement challenges for each of the goals of the 2030 Agenda. Few, if any, countries however currently are able to produce the data and statistics that are required for monitoring progress in the attainment of all 17 goals and 169 targets of the 2030 Agenda, including countries with the strongest statistical systems. Concerted efforts to strengthen the capacity of national statistical systems will be critical to the measurement of progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, informed decision-making and strong accountability, particularly in the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. At the same time, the statistical community will need to develop new methodologies, as currently there are no internationally agreed statistical definitions and guidelines for some indicators.

In recognizing both the importance of data and statistics to the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the need to strengthen the related work, Member States have committed to achieving the following targets:[2]

17.18 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;

17.19 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.

Efforts to strengthen data and statistics should harness the data revolution that is sweeping the globe with new technologies, skills and opportunities to connect official statistics so-called big data, citizen-generated data, and geospatial and Earth observations data for the public good.

Tremendous gaps exist in the availability and quality of data and statistics for monitoring the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

How ready are countries in the Asian and Pacific region to measure and monitor the 2030 Agenda? What exactly are the gaps in the availability and quality of existing data and statistics for the 17 goals and 169 targets of the 2030 Agenda? It will be possible to give precise answers to such questions only after a full set of national, regional and global indicators has been developed.

Preliminary assessments, however, indicate that these gaps will be very wide. In 2014, the United Nations Statistical Commission conducted a survey of Member States on data availability for targets under Goals 1 through 16, in which about a dozen countries in Asia and the Pacific participated; the results are summarized in Table 1. The countries that participated in the survey include some with fairly advanced national statistical systems, and others with less advanced systems. As can be seen, for all targets under Goal 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages), Goal 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) and Goal 7 (Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all), at least 60 per cent of countries reported that they currently collect data for at least one indicator that could possibly measure the target.

On the other hand, data availability is weak across a number of domains, in particular those related to water and sanitation (Goal 6), inequality (Goal 10), urbanization (Goal 11), sustainable consumption and production (Goal 12), marine resources (Goal 14), forests and land degradation (Goal 15) and peace and justice (Goal 16). These results are similar to the global picture that was based on the responses by a total of 67 countries.[3]

Target No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Goal 1	77	77	67	45	55					
Goal 2	92	91	75	77	9					
Goal 3	100	100	90	92	70	92	80	90	73	
Goal 4	100	83	100	67	100	100	42			
Goal 5	91	100	90	73	100	100				
Goal 6	100	79	57	64	36	50				
Goal 7	69	77	77							
Goal 8	75	73	50	60	100	91	70	70	44	50
Goal 9	55	83	27	73	67					
Goal 10	83	50	92	50	10	30	50			
Goal 11	69	64	30	40	64	64	50			
Goal 12	17	62	8	71	71	67	18	27		
Goal 13	75	50	42							
Goal 14	30	50	40	64	40	11	11			
Goal 15	92	75	91	30	75	36	27	36	36	
Goal 16	89	33	56	11	60	44	33	11	75	75

Table 1
The percentage of countries able to produce data for at least one indicator that could be used to measure progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

Source: United Nations Statistics Division, December 2014.

Note: The shaded cells mean that at least 60 per cent of the countries reported that they could currently collect data for at least one indicator that could possibly measure the target. The table contains data for the following countries in the ESCAP region: Armenia; Australia; Bangladesh; Cambodia; India; Indonesia; Mongolia; New Zealand; Philippines; Thailand; Turkey; and Tuvalu.

The real data gaps may even be much larger than the above-mentioned survey indicates. Some of the middle-income countries in the region reported the abilities to compile data for about one quarter of the 200-plus suggested indicators for global monitoring, to about half of such indicators for some high income countries. These estimates did not take into consideration the recommended disaggregation of data.[4]

A 2014 assessment carried out to inform the development of a regional core set of gender indicators revealed that gender-responsive data collection and production were quite weak for such areas as "Participation in unremunerated productive work", the "Human rights of women and girls", "Environment and climate change",

and "Poverty", all of which are high priority goals and targets for promoting gender equality and empowerment of women under the 2030 Agenda. When data are collected and produced, rural-urban disaggregation was not always available, thus potentially hindering the development of policies and programmes to target rural women and girls, a particularly vulnerable group in many developing countries in the region.[5] (Fig 1)

The assessment also revealed wide subregional disparities in readiness to produce and use the regional core set. For some of the basic domains, such as "Poverty", "Participation in unremunerated productive work" and "Governance and participation in public life and decision-making", North and Central Asia as a subregion performed relatively better than other subregions in terms of the data collected and indicators produced, while for other basic domains, such as "Education", "Health and related services" and "Environment and climate change", South-East Asia did relatively better.

Improving key data sources should be a high priority

Official statistics have until now mainly been sourced from a combination of data gathered from statistical surveys and those extracted from other organizations' administrative or management systems. The first consists of sample surveys and periodic censuses. For instance, national statistical offices or other governmental agencies often conduct sample surveys of households to collect information on income and expenditure, health, labour force participation etc. Governments also regularly conduct censuses of population and housing as well as agriculture and economy.

Administrative and management data (business and civil registration records, school enrolment information, police records etc.) are often a by-product of delivering public services. As they are already available within administrative or management systems, using such data eliminates the need for collecting data afresh and can reduce the overall burden placed on respondents while avoiding the costs of data-collection exercises. In addition, the information extracted from such systems often has the advantage of being more timely than statistical data and, when compared with data from surveys (particularly sample surveys), can also deliver data with a greater breadth of coverage.

The World Bank assesses several aspects of a country's capacity to collect, analyse and disseminate key social and economic statistics.[6] Using publicly available information and country inputs, the assessment is focused on major data sources, periodicity and methodology. The adequacy of source data is based on the availability and frequency of such key statistical surveys as poverty surveys, health surveys, population censuses, agricultural censuses and vital registration systems. A score of 100 means that a country conducts poverty and health surveys at least once every 3 years, population and agricultural censuses at least once every 10 years, and is judged to have complete registries of births and deaths.

As can be seen in Figure 2, countries in Asia and the Pacific scored higher on average than those in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as sub-Saharan Africa, but lower than those in

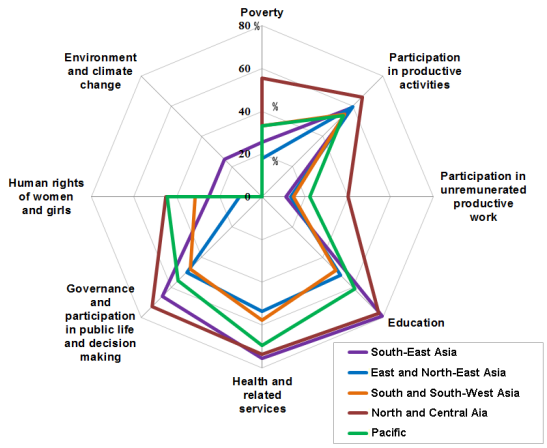


Figure 1
Percentage of countries collecting gender -responses data by thematic area.

Source: Sharita Serrao, "Strengthening gender statistics and indicators in Asia and the Pacific: a key foundation for the sustainable development agenda beyond 2015", *ESCAP Stats Brief*, No. 11 (August 2015). Available at: http://www.unescap.org/resources/stats-brief-august-2015-issue-no-11-strengthening-gender-statistics-and-indicators-asia.

Latin America and the Caribbean in terms of adequacy of key data sources.

There was enormous variation across countries in Asia and the Pacific however. Only three countries in the region had full scores on the adequacy of selected key social and economic statistics sources: Mongolia; the Philippines; and Viet Nam. It is clear that most countries in the region need to improve their key social and economic data sources, in particular Afghanistan, Myanmar, Uzbekistan and quite a number of countries in the Pacific. (Fig 2)

For several countries, their scores on data sources increased over the years: Afghanistan from 20 points in 2004 to 40 points in 2014; Fiji from 40 points in 2005 to 80 points in 2014; and the Philippines and Viet Nam from 80 points each in 2004 to 100 points in 2014. This reflects an increase in key data collection in these countries. Perhaps it is no coincidence that Chan and others[7] observed an increase in household surveys that provided important data for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals, in particular such international surveys as the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, the Demographic and Health Survey Programme, the International Comparison Programme and the Living Standard Measurement Survey.

In contrast to the flourishing of household surveys large, improvements are still needed in vital statistics stemming from the registration of births and deaths. Complete registration of vital events – essential for monitoring health outcomes and population dynamics – should be among the best administrative data available. According to assessments of civil registration and vital statistics systems conducted in 47 Asia-Pacific countries between 2010 and 2012, only 11 were categorized as satisfactory, while 36 were found to be dysfunctional, weak or inadequate.[8] The region has therefore ramped up efforts to improve civil registration and vital statistics systems, which involves addressing barriers to reporting births and deaths, fostering cooperation between key agencies and overcoming shortfalls in how the data are recorded and managed. The task is complex and expensive, and will take a significant amount of time and effort to resolve (Box 1)

Many existing data and statistics trail behind developments in the field and sometimes by a wide margin

The deadline for the very ambitious 2030 Agenda is a mere 15 years in the future. Ideally, there should be sufficient data to establish baselines for the various goals and targets when implementation of the Agenda begins in 2016. There should be timely data and statistics that can be used to assess progress towards achieving the targets at national, regional and global levels so that the stakeholders can adjust their policies and programmes accordingly. In general, statistics that are to be used in forming judgements and making decisions must be available in a time frame useful for making judgements and decisions. Statistics that are

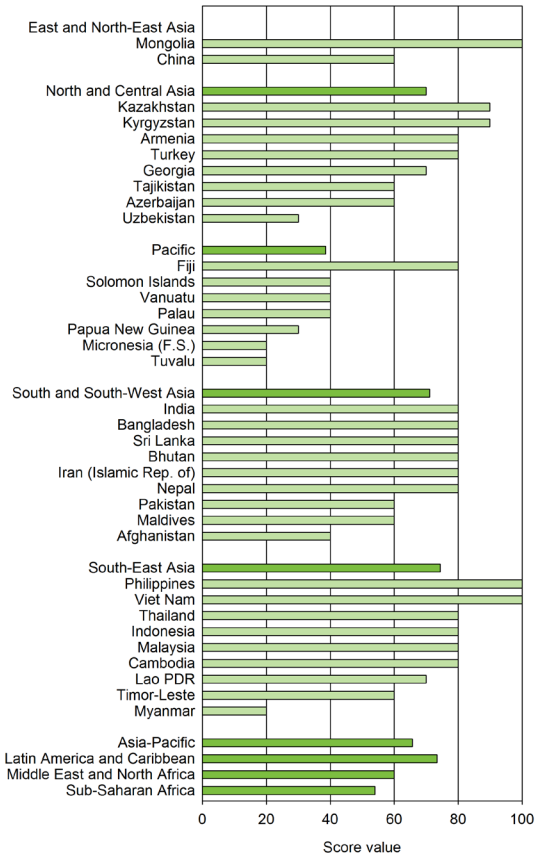


Figure 2
Scores of national statistical capacity: data sources (0 through 100), 2014

Source: World Bank, "Statistical Capacity Indicator Dashboard". Available from http://datatopics.worldbank.org/statisticalcapacity/SCIdashboard.aspx. Accessed on 17 September 2015.

continually lagging behind the changes in the real world may be of little value to such users.

Lack of timely data for high-priority development areas was also a challenge for achieving the targets of the Millennium Development Goals, for example the key indicators relating to child nutrition and maternal health, both of which remain major development issues in the region. Comparable data on the prevalence of underweight children and the rate of skilled birth attendance, available for only half the ESCAP member States, are becoming dated, the most recent statistics being from 2008 and 2009 respectively. The lack of evidence on where to target health services and whether or not child and maternal health programmes are reaching those most in need could be a major impediment to effective action.[9]

The World Bank's assessment of statistical capacity includes the periodicity and timeliness of data, based on how frequently data on some indicators of the Millennium Development Goals were produced at the national level. These indicators include $1 per day poverty; under age 5 malnutrition; use of maternal health services; improved water sources (3 years or less); HIV infection (available for the last 3 years); under age 5 mortality (available for reference year); gender equality in primary and secondary schools, and primary completion (observed in last 5 years); under age 1 measles immunization; and per capita GDP growth (annual).

Out of the 35 countries in Asia-Pacific included in the assessment, only Indonesia had a full score on the measure of periodicity and timeliness in 2014, although Bhutan and Tajikistan had relatively high scores. The challenge to produce timely data for key Millennium Development Goal indicators was evident in most of the other countries too, particularly those in the Pacific subregion. (Fig 3)

Box 1

Strengthening civil registration and vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific by 2024

In November 2014, the Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) in Asia and the Pacific adopted a Ministerial Declaration to "Get Every One in the Picture" and proclaimed the "Asian and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade, 2015-2024.[a] To implement the declaration, Governments of countries in Asia and the Pacific endorsed a regional action framework of goals and nationally set time-bound targets for civil registration coverage, issuance of legal documentation and production of vital statistics by 2024. More specifically, the goals are:

(a) Universal civil registration of births, deaths and other vital events;
(b) All individuals are provided with legal documentation of civil registration of births, deaths and other vital events, as necessary, to claim identity, civil status and ensuing rights;
(c) Accurate, complete and timely vital statistics (including on causes of death) are produced based on registration records and are disseminated.

At the same time, Governments and development partners committed to coordinated and concerted efforts in the following seven action areas:

(a) Political commitment;
(b) Public engagement, participation and generation of demand;
(c) Coordination;
(d) Policies, legislation and implementation of regulations;
(e) Infrastructure and resources;
(f) Operational procedures, practices and innovations;
(g) Production, dissemination and use of vital statistics.

a See E/ESCAP/71/27 and E/ESCAP/RES/71/14

Similar challenges were identified in a region-wide assessment of economic statistics that ESCAP conducted in 2013. That assessment revealed that only a minority of the 51 economies (7 to 20) were producing key economic statistics at the recommended frequency, the notable exceptions being statistics such as the consumer price index, merchandise trade statistics, and balance of payments statistcs. (Table 2)

Improving the accuracy and reliability of data and statistics should be a high priority

Data and statistics are useful only if they are of sufficient accuracy and reliability to be able to provide an adequate answer to questions that matter. In other words, the measures provided by data and statistics must be sufficiently close to reality to provide the basis for making appropriate judgements and decisions.

Statistical guidelines and procedures are a safeguard in the production of accurate and reliable statistics. The World Bank's measure of national statistical capacity assesses a country's adherence to internationally recommended standards and methods to compile macroeconomic and social statistics, reporting and estimation practices. More specifically, countries are evaluated against a set of criteria, such as the national accounts base year, use of the latest of balance of payments manual, external debt reporting status, subscription to the special data dissemination standard of IMF, and reporting of enrolment data to UNESCO. (Fig 4)

The urgency to improve the accuracy and reliability of available data and statistics in high-priority policy areas is evident in Asia and the Pacific. An example is the count of people with disabilities, which underlies the collective commitments by national Governments in the region to the initiative to "Make the right real".[10] Despite the high level of policy priority, the exact figure reflecting the prevalence of disability varies wildly across countries, ranging from about 1 per cent of the population at one end of the spectrum to as high as almost 20 per cent at the other. A key reason for the wide variation across the region is the differences in the definitions of "disability" and "persons with disabilities" that are used for collecting disability data. Those differences render data comparisons across countries unreliable and thus hinder meaningful policy discussions at the regional level.[11] Similarly, as Asia and the Pacific is the most

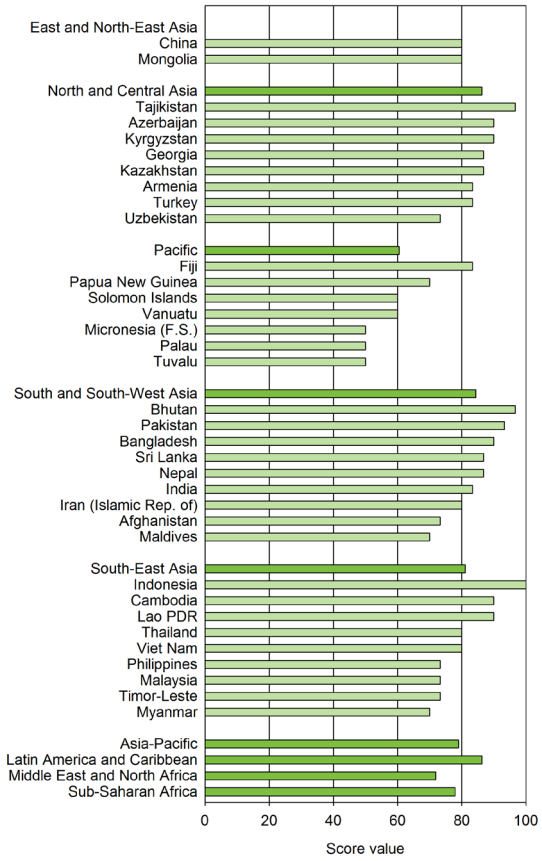


Figure 3
Scores of national statistical capacity: periodicity and timeliness (0 through 100), 2014

Source: World Bank, "Statistical Capacity Indicator Dashboard". Available from http://datatopics.worldbank.org/statisticalcapacity/SCIdashboard.aspx. Accessed on 17 September 2015..

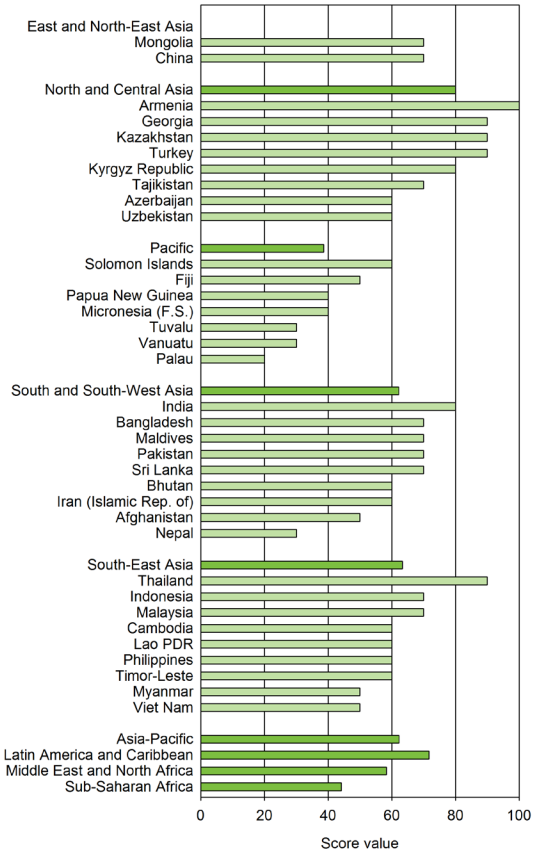
Meeting recommended frequency	Number of States	Percentage
Quarterly GDP	23	45
Monthly commodity price indices	11	21
Annual productivity measures	17	33
Quarterly Balance of Payments	34	67
Annual indicators related to natural resources	8	16

Table 2
ESCAP capacity screening of timeliness in producing the core set of economic statistics, 2013

Source: ESCAP Statistics Division

Note: The results are based on responses by 51 member States.

Figure 4
Scores of national statistical capacity: dimension of statistical methodology (0 through 100), 2014



Source: World Bank, "Statistical Capacity Indicator Dashboard". Available from http://datatopics.worldbank.org/statisticalcapacity/SCIdashboard.aspx. Accessed on 17 September 2015.

natural disaster-prone region of the world, managing disaster risks is a high priority for national authorities as well as development partners. However, there are serious gaps in the quality of existing statistics on such key issues as hazards, vulnerability and exposure due to the lack of agreed definitions and guidelines for data collection, compilation and dissemination.

Such persistent data challenges on priority development issues in Asia and the Pacific mirror those at the global level. Commentators have pointed out that the development community has repeatedly stated that 70 per cent of the world's poor are female, albeit without much certainty about the reliability of this figure.[12] Similarly, global poverty rates may have been underestimated by as many as 250 million individuals.[13]

The accuracy and reliability of data and statistics depend upon the quality of source data, including their competences. For instance, global monitoring of Millennium Development Goal targets on reducing maternal and child mortality relies on estimates that are typically based on data from statistical surveys. However, statistical estimates of maternal mortality have several severe limitations regarding the use of definitions, and under- or overreporting, as well as obtaining disaggregations for subpopulations.[14] One solution to these limitations is a well-functioning national civil registration and vital statistical system, with universal coverage and accurate recording of births, deaths, causes of death, and other vital events (Box 2).

National statistical institutions need strengthening

Strong institutions are a key to a well-functioning statistical system. Such institutions are underpinned by a strong legal framework that mandates a country's statistical office and other agencies to produce and use official statistics. This framework provides the basis for the "right to information" and ensures that data are not only available but also relevant and cost effective. The institutional set-up of a well-functioning statistical system is one that can facilitate frequent and meaningful exchanges between data producers and users, develop robust and sustainable data sources, apply statistical guidelines and standards, and maintain a workforce of skilled and motivated staff. The institutional set-up would also ensure that the whole of Government and its development partners make a beneficial impact on data quality through their demand for and use of official statistics, as well as by investing adequate resources in statistical work.

In response to the 2013 ESCAP screening of national capacity to produce and disseminate economic statistics, all countries but one reported having statistical legislation

specifying the responsibilities of government agencies in the production of official statistics. However, only 44 member States had articles protecting the independence of official statistics from political influence, an essential safeguard for the integrity and credibility of official statistics, and a foundation for public trust and confidence. (Table 3)

Official statistics are produced by Governments and other public entities. As such effective coordination among the various producers is essential to a strong national statistical institution. The above-mentioned assessment suggested that much improvement is needed in Asia and the Pacific. Only 37 countries out of a total of 51, reported having clear specification of the different responsibilities among various public entities producing economic statistics. A similar number of them reported that they were working on plans to improve coordination. Assessments in other domains of official statistics in the region, including agricultural and rural statistics, gender statistics and civil registration and vital statistics, have all pointed to the need for strengthening coordination among key national stakeholders as a priority for making further improvements in the availability and quality of statistics in these areas.[15]

Strong national statistical institutions are essential for driving the transformative changes that are required to leverage the data revolution needed to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Continuous and strengthened production and dissemination of relevant, reliable and impartial statistics based on international standards are needed.

National statistical systems also need to be empowered, resourced and kept independent so that they can quickly adapt to the rapid increase in and use of new sources and types of data to complete official statistics. The world has witnessed rapid increases in the availability and use of big data, including information automatically recorded and stored from the use of the Internet, satellite imagery, mobile phones and electronic payments etc. In addition, a vast amount of additional quantitative and qualitative information is gathered from various government agencies, academia, the business sector and civil society organizations, which can be used for evidence-based decision-making. Technological advancements have also resulted in the availability of new and more powerful tools and methods of data analysis and presentation.

Indeed, national statistical systems need to lead the coordination of a national data ecosystem that comprises: Government and other entities investing in statistics; international organizations responsible for developing standards and guidelines; various governmental and non-governmental entities that produce and share data and statistics, as well as a broad range of data users in the Government, civil society, the business sector and international organizations (Box 2). Strong national statistical institutions are needed to build and maintain partnerships for strengthened data and statistics for achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

Table 3
ESCAP capacity screening of economic capacity: statistical legislation and national statistical coordination, 2013

Statistical legislation	Number of States
Existence of a statistical law indicating distribution of responsibility for producing official statistics	50
Statistical law protects the independence of official statistics from political influence	44
National statistical coordination	
The distribution of responsibility among agencies for producing a core set of economic statistics is clearly specified	37
Plans are currently being implemented or are under development to improve coordination in production of economic statistics	38

Source: United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), "Draft report on the region-wide capacity screening of economic statistics in Asia and the Pacific". The document may be downloaded from a link at http://www.unescap.org/resources/report-region-wide-capacity-screening-economic-statistics-asia-and-pacific.

Note: The results are based on responses by 51 member States.

Box 2

A global initiative to strengthen data ecosystems for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

The Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data is a multi-stakeholder network of Governments, international organizations, companies, civil society groups, statistics and data communities that represent all sectors of society and all regions of the world; it is committed to harnessing the data revolution to fill critical gaps and ensure that data are more accessible and useable in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

The vision of the Global Partnership is a world in which everyone is able to engage in solving the world's greatest problems by using data effectively and fostering trust and accountability in the sharing of data. The Global Partnership works to achieve that vision by bringing the resources of a wide range of stakeholders to bear on the world's development "data poverty" and modernize the data driving the world's sustainable development efforts.

On 28 September 2015, the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data was officially launched, with its first year of work being focused on the following:

(a) Set up national, multi-stakeholder data collaboratives to harness the data revolution in all member countries, focusing on building capacity to generate, share and use data at the local level;

(b) Contribute data, including from new data sources and other resources, to fill gaps in the creation of national baselines for the Sustainable Development Goals;

(c) Create dynamic visualizations with the best available data related to the Sustainable Development Goals, and make them accessible and actionable for citizens, policymakers and business leaders;

(d) Build support for principles to harness the data revolution for sustainable development, including the sharing and leveraging of privately held data;

(e) Convene local, regional, thematic and global data events to foster increased connectivity, collaboration and innovation.

Source: http://www.data4sdgs.org/.

Endnotes

1 General Assembly resolution 70/1.

2 Complete details are available from https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld.

3 See E/CN.3/2015/2.

4 Based on discussions at the regional consultation "Monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals: Meeting to identify Asia-Pacific regional and sub-regional priorities", held in Bangkok in September 2015 ,

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7 Margaret Chan, Michel Kazatchkine, Julian Lob-Levyt, Thoraya Obaid, Julian Schweizer, Michel Sidibe, Ann Veneman and Tadataka Yamada, "Meeting the demand for results and accountability: acall for action on health data from eight global health agencies", *PLoS Medicine*, vol. 7, No. 1 (January 2010).

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10 See ESCAP resolution 69/13, annex.

11 Ibid.

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