United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians (CES)

7th Expert Meeting on Statistics for SDGs

12 - 13 April 2023, Geneva

Session 4: Disaggregation and inclusive data

Addressing the SDG data gap in Azerbaijan

Prepared by Gular Fatali, Data Management, UN RCO Azerbaijan

1.   How it all started

1.   Over the last five years, Azerbaijan has demonstrated firm commitment to the Agenda 2030 and Leave No One Behind principle. The Government submitted its 3rd Voluntary National Review (VNR) report in 2021, reporting against the 17 SDGs, 88 targets, and 119 indicators on the economic, social, and environmental aspects of sustainable development that they prioritized. In the report, the Government renewed its commitment to improve data collection and analysis, particularly to address the challenges around availability and disaggregation of SDG data.

2.   When we started designing the Common Country Analysis in 2019, we quickly realized that the unavailability of SDG data, especially disaggregated data, was a major challenge for effectively tracking the development situation in the country. Missing data made it difficult to tailor UN-government joint programming to the needs and priorities of vulnerable groups whose situation is not fully reflected in generic statistics, such as migrants, persons living in poverty and communities displaced as a result of conflict. The situation of women and girls among these groups was also not aptly represented in official data.

3.   To address this concern, the Resident Coordinator and the Head of the State Statistical Committee (SSC) set up a UNCT-SSC Joint Taskforce (JTF) on SDG Data in March 2020. The JTF was envisioned as a platform within which UN and government experts could get together to discuss practical ways to generate, store and analyze disaggregated SDG data. An in-depth assessment of the SDG data monitoring and reporting mechanisms, commissioned by the JTF in mid-2020, reconfirmed the findings in the VNRs, and the CCA regarding the challenge of data availability and disaggregation in Azerbaijan. Of 119 SDG indicators, data was available only for 72. Of these 72 indicators, only 16 were fully disaggregated, 23 were partly disaggregated, whereas 20 required some form of disaggregation[1]. The JTF therefore agreed to design an 18-month partnership programme until the end of 2021, focusing among capacity-building pillars on i) improving data disaggregation; and ii) promoting alternative / innovative data sources to close the data gap.

---

[1] The latest update as of March 2023:

4.   In November 2020 the JTF organized a workshop where local and international experts exchanged experiences on data availability and disaggregation in several countries that are pertinent to Azerbaijan. As a follow-up action to the workshop , the JTF agreed to develop a technical guidebook for practitioners -"Data Disaggregation for the SDGs"- which used a compilation of lessons learned and best practices presented at the workshop.

5.   The JTF identified two statistical methods that can be applied in Azerbaijan to address SDG data gaps, i.e., Small Area Estimation (SAE) and mobile phone data. We have delivered information sessions for SSC staff to apply SAE to the disaggregation of certain SDG indicators such as on poverty, employment and health (2021). While the SSC is cautious of the deployment of the new methods, we continue engaging with them to explore the best ways of applying new data collection methods.

2.   Cooperation Framework as a further leverage:

6.   Building on the findings of the CCA and the work of the JTF, a new standalone Outcome was integrated to the new Cooperation Framework (2021-2025) titled "Quality (up-to-date, accurate, collected and analyzed in line with internationally accepted methodology), disaggregated and timely data is available and used to inform decision-making and policies that leave no one behind" with specific indicators measuring progress on SDG data availability with disaggregation and existing capacities. The JTF continued its work under this Outcome area with an extended membership and initiatives. While the initiatives under the Data Outcome are usually single entity initiatives targeting specific SDG indicators, the RCO continues to bring together relevant UN expertise and the government counterparts to address the overall SDG data challenges in the country and look for alternative/innovative ways of addressing these issues.

7.   A roundtable discussion on "Partnership opportunities with CSOs to strengthen SDG data in Azerbaijan" was organized in 2021 to facilitate the exchange of practices and experiences in the region and beyond on the role of civil society organizations and entities in data collection and reporting for SDGs. SSC was also supported with translation and editing of SDG metadata and connecting to custodian agencies for the indicators they needed support. Differences between national SDG database and global DESA database was carried out in 2021 and inconsistencies and data gaps were communicated to the SSC. Building on the national interest around country's ranking in the SDG Index of the Sustainable Development Report and with the request of the Government, UNCT kicked off consultations with national partners to review and analyze SDG data gaps/inconsistencies and methodological issues across global and national databases (May-June 2022) and discuss ways to improve data collection for the indicators that miss data and achieve progress on the ground for the indicators that are lagging behind (consultation workshop in September 2022). Since then, the data issues have been raised with custodian agencies and work is in progress to address those challenges.

3.   Data to inform policy making

8.   SDG policy dialogues kicked off in November 2022, the first which focused on Green Transformation where the country's progress towards achieving the green growth indicators[2] was reviewed and additional policy measures to accelerate the country's green transformation and progress towards the SDGs were discussed. By building on the discussions and commitments voiced during the dialogue, the Policy Brief was produced that provides a succinct summary of the analysis of green growth progress and offers set of policy recommendations.

---

[2] Read more in detail here, p. 26-29 https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/ECECESSTAT20231.pdf

9.   The 2nd SDG Dialogue (June 2023) themed "Inclusive economic growth and social inclusion in Azerbaijan" analyses progress against 27 indicators of Inclusive Growth Index (IGI)[3] which are aligned with SDGs, to discuss the ways for further enhancing social inclusion of vulnerable groups - unemployed youth, women, IDPs, migrants, rural people, the elderly population, people with disabilities and others- and ways to facilitate their better participation in socio-economic processes.

Reflections – challenges, what worked and why:

10.   It is difficult to get statistical authorities to move away from established standards and conventional approaches. Below are some reflections on what worked for us.

- **Find what resonates with Government partners, and choose the right time to start a conversation**

11.   Having seen the Government's strong commitment to the SDGs, we used the VNR report, where the SDG data gap was mentioned, as an entry point to bring the Government onboard. During a meeting about the Cooperation Framework with the SSC, the RC shared highlights from the SDG mapping we did for the CCA to flag data gaps which would make effective monitoring and reporting difficult. This triggered a breakthrough for the establishment of the JTF. We ensured government buy-in by inviting the Deputy Chairperson of the SSC to join as Co-Chair of the taskforce together with the Head of RCO. Given that the SSC was also under government pressure to show quality data at that time, this was a win-win situation.

- **Go the extra mile to acknowledge your partner's achievements**

12.   Cooperation with international players and ranking in the global reports is perceived positively in Azerbaijan as it is seen as an opportunity to gain visibility and showcase national experience which also helps to improve quality of work of the national institutions. We therefore invited top notch international data practitioners to JTF events to help the Government connect with them and establish a substantive partnership, while also providing them with an opportunity to be shown as innovative and open to new ideas. SDG Index ranking served to further publicize the Government's commitment to SDGs and also provided a space to improve learning and cooperation with international partners.

- **Find common "pain points" that can bring UNCT together**

13.   Several UN entities have an established partnership with the SSC and have been working on data for years. When working on innovation in SDG data, we were cautious not to overlap with what had already been implemented by UN entities. We instead focused on bringing them together around elements which we knew agencies did not already work on.

What's on the horizon:

14.   One of the major initiatives for 2023 is the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) that will make data available on 21 SDG indicators with disaggregation particularly on the situation of women and children.

---

[3] https://unctad.org/news/inclusive-growth-remains-elusive-inequality-persists-globally

15.   In 2023, UNCT will join efforts to build capacities and strengthen data collection in agriculture, transport, migration and health and will conduct research and advocacy on population dynamics and projections, sexual reproductive health and gender equality with particular focus on those furthest behind.

16.   UNCT will also follow up on SDG data consultations in the view of SDG Index report of 2023 and other global reports to build on its work with custodian agencies to improve SDG data availability for the country.

17.   SDG dialogues will continue to provide a forum to translate the data into policy actions and decisions.

_____