

Official Statistics and Human Rights

“Statistics matter for human rights, and human rights matter for statistics”

The realisation of human rights correlates with the availability of sound official statistics. Statisticians play a critical role in supporting evidence-based policy and measuring civil, economic, political and social rights. In accordance with internationally accepted standards, starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the dissemination of relevant statistical information is essential to meet peoples’ right to information and delivering on related entitlements to participation and accountability. On the other hand, efforts to protect human rights facilitate the establishment of trustworthy statistics. Upholding rights, such as the rights to privacy and to be registered, as well as the rights of statisticians themselves, who sometimes have to fear for their security in doing their work, is vital to ensure robustness and independence in official statistical systems. Today, the data revolution for the new sustainable development agenda constitutes a unique opportunity for strengthening the links between statistics and human rights.

What would a human rights-based approach to the data revolution for the Post-2015 development agenda entail in practice?

Disaggregation



Disaggregating indicators by grounds of discrimination prohibited by international human rights law to the extent feasible: in order that no-one is excluded or left behind, and in conformity with SDG17.18 stating that indicators should be disaggregated by “income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national context”.

Human Rights Standards



Measuring implementation of human rights standards critical to the realisation of the SDGs, including availability, accessibility and quality of rights-related services (e.g. health care, education, conditions of detention) and goods (e.g. water); use of maximum available resources domestically and internationally; non-discrimination and equality; participation; access to justice and freedom from violence.

Participation



Facilitating participation of rights-holders and other relevant stakeholders in the measurement process: “nothing about us without us” has been a motto in the human rights field. For instance, there are already a number of collaborative efforts involving national statistical offices and representative of population groups (e.g. indigenous peoples, minorities, persons with disabilities) and national human rights institutions (e.g. Bolivia, Philippines).

Data Collection Safeguards



Ensuring human rights safeguards in the collection, processing and dissemination of data, including data confidentiality, non-discrimination and self-identification.

Accountability Framework



Strengthening accountability and policy coherence using frameworks of structural, process and outcome indicators (as recommended by international human rights mechanisms): measuring the linkage between human rights commitments (legal and institutional framework), efforts (policy implementation) and results for concerned populations, using multiple data sources (e.g. statistical surveys, administrative records, big data, civil society organizations and human rights mechanisms).

“Any legal or regulatory mechanisms, or networks or partnerships, set up to mobilize the data revolution for sustainable development should have the protection of human rights as a core part of their activities, specify who is responsible for upholding those rights, and should support the protection, respect and fulfillment of human rights”

“We should never forget that behind every piece of statistical data are human beings who were born free and equal in dignity and rights. We must strive to make their human rights stories, especially those of the powerless, visible through robust indicators and to use them in constantly improving our human rights policies and implementation systems to bring positive change to people’s lives”.

High Commissioner for Human Rights

Over the last decade, there has been a growing demand for statistical information emanating from the human rights field, including from international human rights mechanisms, States and civil society. Efforts at national and international levels towards the realization of human rights are increasingly using disaggregated statistics, indicators, targets and other benchmarks to enable more systematic measurement and implementation of human rights norms and principles. Reliable data and statistics provide powerful tools for focused advocacy, identification of gaps in the realization of human rights, and the creation of a culture of accountability and transparency.

The increasing demand for statistics in the human rights field coincides with the extensive use of statistical indicators in the development field, as illustrated by the Millennium Development Goals. The MDGs have demonstrated the power of statistical indicators in monitoring the implementation of policy commitments. It has also revealed serious limitations and risks of traditional statistical approaches for human rights. Predominant attention to national averages has contributed to statistical invisibility of populations, leaving them further behind. By relying on already available socio-economic statistics, MDGs indicators have silenced human rights commitments agreed upon by Member States in the Millennium Declaration. In response to the demand for human rights sensitive indicators and the need to strengthen the integration and measurement of human rights in development and governance policy efforts, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in consultation with experts in human rights, development and statistics, has developed practical guidance on human rights and statistics. This material was published in Human Rights Indicators: A Guide to Measurement and Implementation accessible in English, French and Spanish from: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Indicators/Pages/HRIndicatorsIndex.aspx>

Key resources



Human Rights Indicators: A Guide to Measurement and Implementation

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Indicators/Pages/documents.aspx>



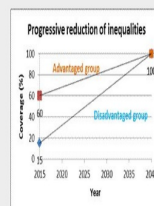
Who will be Accountable? Human Rights and the Post-2015 Development Agenda

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/MDG/Pages/Resources.aspx>



Joint Statement of the Chairpersons of the UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies on the Post-2015 Development Agenda

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15505&>



Statement by 17 Special Procedures mandate-holders of the Human Rights Council on the Post-2015 development agenda

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=13341&>



Keynote by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights at the Presentation of the report of the UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 Development Agenda: “Statistics and indicators for the Post-2015 development agenda”

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=13509&LangID=E>



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