

The 7th session of the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development
Item 4 of the Provisional Agenda
Implementation of the mandate and programme of work - Focused thematic discussion

Beyond GDP

Concept Note

*Dialogue on a Right to Development Approach to Measuring Progress Beyond GDP
and contribution to the process in the lead up to the SDG summit.*

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Introduction¹

The Gross Domestic Product is one of the most influential statistics ever. While complex in calculations, its use is simple, setting a common language for statisticians, economists, policymakers, and the public, to measure economic progress and even to depict a country's overall development progress or regress.

However, the shortcomings of GDP have also been well recognized. GDP and the related system of national accounts (SNA) do not “measure progress towards socially and economically inclusive, just, and sustainable development.” The narrow focus on GDP risks obscuring measures relating to human and planetary wellbeing and de-emphasizing or distracting policy focus and actions on these issues.

Measuring inclusive, just, and sustainable development

The 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) were universally adopted by Member States to address the shortcomings stemming from single focus on economic growth. Their 231 indicators provide the most comprehensive measures of inclusive, just, and sustainable development across countries.

Other metrics and indicators have also been elaborated to address the shortcoming in the use of GDP in the multilateral system, which is often tied to concessional financing and other entitlements. Notably, small islands developing States (SIDS) have led the call for a new form of measurement that recognizes ecological and economic vulnerability. The UN is working with SIDS to develop a Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) to help SIDS access “the

¹ The introduction is based on the paper Valuing What Counts ([Valuing What Counts: United Nations System-wide Contribution on Beyond Gross Domestic Product \(GDP\)](#)) which provides the basis for the upcoming policy brief by the Secretary-General on the theme of Beyond GDP

concessional financing that they need to survive the climate catastrophe, to improve their long-term national planning, service their debts, and sign up to insurance and compensation schemes.”²

The Secretary General has initiated work within the UN system to advance metrics to complement GDP that are “concise, widely accepted, comparable, and attractive for decision -making.” The metrics should “go beyond gross domestic product (GDP), so that decisions on debt relief, concessional funding and international cooperation take account of vulnerability, well-being, sustainability and other vital measures of progress.”³ The proposed Beyond GDP framework contains three outcome elements (wellbeing and agency, respect for life and the planet, and reduced inequalities and greater solidarity) and three process elements (from vulnerability to resilience to strengthen preparedness, participatory governance and stronger institutions to ensure equal and safe societal conditions, and innovative and ethical economies) .

A set of core metrics will be proposed, consisting of “10 to 20 headline indicators to focus and balance policy efforts, building on existing indicators, particularly SDG indicators, and current statistical framework.”

The way forward

The multiple crises that the world is facing, including growing polarization and the so-called triple planetary crisis, i.e. climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss, compel for a reevaluation of what counts and what should be measured to monitor development progress and provide guidance or evidence base for policy making.

The challenges lie on not only identifying the elements and dimensions, including those considered by the right to development framework, beyond GDP, but also on how the decisions should be made and by whom, to establish an accepted “measure of progress beyond income, beyond averages and beyond today,” and premised on international human rights.

Purpose:

To engage relevant experts in examining how to go Beyond GDP from the right to development perspective, with a view to formulating EMRTD contribution to the process in the lead up to the 2023 SDG summit in September 2023.

Guiding questions:

1. What policy frameworks have been elaborated at national and multilateral levels to move beyond GDP?

² Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States “[Multidimensional Vulnerability Index](#).”

³ United Nations “[Today We Must Begin ‘Moving Recommendations in Our Common Agenda from Ideas to Action — from Abstract to Concrete’](#), Secretary-General Tells General Assembly,” 13 February 2023

2. Why is it important to address the process of moving beyond GDP from the right to the development perspective?
3. What needs to be done from the right to development perspective to move beyond GDP?
4. What recommendations can be made to reevaluate development and progress beyond GDP without taking away the focus from the most in-need States, such as the current Least Developed Countries?

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