



Measuring for Monitoring: The State of Data for SDGs in Bangladesh

Report Highlights

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In the context of global efforts to identify the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, various stakeholders, including the Government of Bangladesh, development partners, non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations, among others, have highlighted the issue of data. Stakeholders agree that more and better data are key to measuring progress and it is important to ensure upfront that adequate preparations are made to generate data for post-2015 in both developed and developing countries. Indeed, to support a goal-based, universal and country-relevant post-2015 agenda, the United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda called for a "data revolution" in 2013. Despite the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in uniting the international community around a set of prioritised global agendas for development, the MDGs have been criticised for not being adequately embedded in national policy processes. Further, the MDGs have been constrained by inadequate data and information, which have made assessing progress difficult. Consequently, transparency and accountability have been undermined.

Taking into account the demand-side needs and supply-side possibilities of a data revolution, an initiative titled "The Post-2015 Data Test: Unpacking the Data Revolution at the Country Level" was launched by Bangladesh's Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and Canada's Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (NPSIA) in association with Southern Voice on Post-MDG International Development Goals. This report, the Bangladesh case study, is part of seven country studies under the initiative. It examines and recommends national-level post-2015 priorities for Bangladesh and identifies challenges associated with measuring the post-2015 agenda in Bangladesh, focusing on eight candidate goal areas: poverty, education, employment and inclusive growth, energy and infrastructure, environmental sustainability and disaster resilience, governance, global partnership for sustainable development, and health.

The report intends to benefit policy-makers and other stakeholders including academics, civil society actors and development partners by offering a deeper understanding of the state of data for measuring Bangladesh's progress on the post-2015 agenda. The findings of the report will enable concerned stakeholders to take corrective measures, undertake new initiatives to address data deficits and take steps to generate new data in view of the post-2015 agenda. The report will also be helpful to global actors by offering insights into data situations in low-income countries and outlining technical and financial support measures to help equip these countries to measure progress on and monitor implementation of the post-2015 agenda.

The Bangladesh case study presents an overall assessment of existing statistical capacity in Bangladesh in view of emerging demands in connection with the post-2015 agenda. The study examines data adequacy for measuring post-2015 progress and identifies key opportunities and challenges at the country level to improve data availability, access, timeliness and quality. The feasibility of a selected set of candidate post-2015 targets and indicators is also assessed.

The Bangladesh case study's key findings are:

- Bangladesh has seen gradual improvements in data production, dissemination and use with regard to development issues over the last 10 years.
- The global ambition towards a data revolution has begun to gain ground in Bangladesh. Relevant stakeholders are becoming increasingly aware of emerging data demands.

- Although data availability has improved in Bangladesh, data are currently not readily available for a number of candidate indicators. For instance, needed statistics that are not currently reported in Bangladesh can be estimated or calculated for 42 indicators (out of 120 candidate indicators examined in this study) from existing administrative information and available surveys. Data for several important indicators are unavailable at the level of disaggregation needed.
- The dearth of data will likely make it difficult to establish a baseline for measuring progress on the post-2015 agenda in Bangladesh. Without baseline data it will be difficult for Bangladesh to establish measurable post-2015 targets.
- Available data in Bangladesh are of variable quality. They often suffer from a lack of accuracy and reliability, timeliness and punctuality, accessibility and clarity, and coherence and comparability. There is a need to improve overall data quality. This is particularly true for a number of goal areas, including energy and infrastructure, environmental sustainability and disaster resilience, governance, and global partnership for sustainable development.
- Issues relating to the accessibility and affordability of data need to be urgently addressed. In connection to this, the dissemination of disaggregated and unit-level data should be promoted at a minimum cost. Promoting data dissemination digitally and in user-friendly formats (e.g., spreadsheets) and establishing interactive websites for data should be a priority.
- Global minimum standards for a number of key areas, such as ending extreme poverty by 2030, will be difficult to attain in Bangladesh unless a host of measures are put in place. These measures will require significant resource allocation.
- Although certain efforts have sought to reform the statistical system in Bangladesh, they are inadequate to meet the growing demands for more and better data. For example, Bangladesh is currently implementing a National Strategy for the Development of Statistics for the 2013–23 period. Progress on data improvement activities has not been satisfactory because a number of actions planned as part of the strategy have not been implemented within the stipulated timeframe.
- Expectations for the data revolution vary from stakeholder to stakeholder in Bangladesh. Coordination and cooperation among stakeholders will need to be significantly improved to align expectations. The demands for more frequent, timely, disaggregated, quality data from policy-makers and non-governmental actors need to be recognised by data producers.
- The potential roles of the private sector and modern technology in the data revolution in Bangladesh have yet to be adequately appreciated. A big push is required for the advantages of information and communication technologies to be recognised and leveraged.

Beyond these key findings, the study highlights data challenges for Bangladesh. These include:

- weak infrastructure;
- lack of human resources;
- outdated and inadequate legislation;
- insufficient financial resources;
- inadequate documentation (e.g., metadata, survey methodology);
- duplication of sources;
- poor access to data producers;
- poor coordination among data users, producers and other stakeholders;

- inadequate commitment to quality data production from development partners;
- lack of awareness about importance of statistics among policy designers and decision makers;
- absence of data dissemination policy;
- storage of data not being digitized;
- lack of coherent approach towards validation of unofficial data; and
- absence of transparency and quality control efforts.

Addressing this long list of challenges will not be easy for a country such as Bangladesh and these challenges cannot be solved in a short span of time. There is a need to urgently design an agenda for action to address these challenges. Such an agenda should be informed by key considerations about data production, data availability and access, and capacity and coordination.

Data Production

There is a need to standardise and bring coherence to relevant concepts and definitions of variables through consultations among major stakeholders. New surveys will be needed to generate data on various important indicators. This is particularly true for indicators related to governance and institutional strengthening. There is a need to consolidate existing surveys and data collection procedures. In many cases, surveys should be conducted more frequently, which may require increasing financial, technical, logistical resources and improving human resources. As demands for disaggregated data (e.g., spatial, gender, age-group, ethnicity) grow, data producers should take the necessary steps to address emerging needs by including disaggregated data on their agendas. Concerted efforts need to be taken to enhance the quality of data generated through the use of modern technology. While they are concerned with data related to measuring progress on the post-2015 agenda, policy-makers are also interested in understanding the key factors that influence the attainment of better results, so it will be necessary to generate data that not only monitor post-2015 development outcomes but also the variables that impact them.

Data Availability and Access

Data should be made available in a timely manner to facilitate real-time decision making. Raising administrative efficacy and increasing the use of technology can contribute towards this. Ensuring transparency in data production and access for data users should be a core dimension of the data revolution in Bangladesh. In connection to this, the development of a data dissemination plan and updated legislation are required.

Capacity and Coordination

Adequate funding for strengthening institutional capacity and undertaking new activities needs to be ensured. Together with the Government of Bangladesh, development partners need to address this issue upfront in their planning. Coordination among data producers and data users should be strengthened to harness existing capacities in the private sector. Institutional capacity needs to be enhanced, keeping medium-term needs associated with the post-2015 agenda in the purview. Above all, the data revolution in the context of the post-2015 agenda requires a new set of institutional arrangements. In September 2015, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will represent the Government of Bangladesh at the United Nations summit where the post-2015 agenda will be finalised. The General Economics Division of the Planning Commission is expected to play a key role in planning and coordinating the subsequent implementation process. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics will play a central role in generating data to track development progress. Local Consultative Groups may coordinate development partners' initiatives, while the Ministry of Finance, including its Economic Relations Division, ought to coordinate financing needs. Civil society organisations and other

stakeholder groups will be both generators and users of key data. Analysts, experts and researchers will use relevant data to measure and assess progress. A comprehensive plan on data that articulates concrete tasks for specific institutions and stakeholders will need to be designed. Only such a plan will enable a data revolution to occur in Bangladesh.