IUCN’s preliminary views on the SDGs indicators framework
17 March 2015

The outcome document of the Rio+20 conference, The Future We Want, reaffirmed the world’s commitment to sustainable development and called for the elaboration of a set of Sustainable Development Goals which should be “aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries” and be built on commitments already made. The Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals (OWG) set up in January 2013 under the auspices of the UN General Assembly produced a proposal with a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets.

One key transformative element of the current SDGs framework is the manner in which it integrates the different dimensions of sustainable development: social, economic and environmental considerations. Therefore the discussions of the OWG resulted in a set of goals and targets with many interlinkages striking a certain level of balance. Having targets across the framework covering the different dimensions aims at ensuring the integration needed to achieve sustainable development and at correcting the silo approach of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

There is wide recognition that weak accountability systems are one of the major challenges to achieving sustainable development. Accountability, the requirement to accept responsibility and answer for actions, depends on different elements such as societal decision making, clear definition of roles and responsibility and answerability. In addition, monitoring and evaluation to measure progress are an important aspect. Hence, the design of appropriate and science-based indicators is essential to design and put in place an accountability mechanism or a mechanism for review and monitoring of the SDGs that is as robust as possible.

Therefore important discussions have started on the shape and details of the indicators framework. The home of the discussions will be within the UN Statistical Commission which just created and mandated an Inter-Agency Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals (IAEG). At the same time, many international organizations and research institutions are developing draft indicators to submit to this process, such as the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (here).
**Ensuring integration in the SDG indicators framework**

Discussions on indicators to measure progress should carry on at the level of integration among the different dimensions of the SDGs framework as currently articulated. There are many challenges ahead such as the complexity of the framework, the multiple stakeholders involved in generating data, the lack of data in some areas, the insufficient capacity of some countries to generate such data and/or apply methodologies, the diversity of methodologies to gather and analyse data, etc. These challenges have always been present in any global process establishing goals and targets. The SDGs framework is an opportunity to match scientific data and/or the development of scientific data to clear policy demands. It is also an opportunity to channel resources to raise capacity of governments and relevant stakeholders to gather and analyse data. In sum, this is a unique chance to address the challenges related to data and indicators in different sectors of sustainable development.

**Building the indicators framework on essential principles to ensure a robust monitoring**

Following on the above, IUCN recommends governments and the members of the IAEG to build the indicators framework based on the following principles:

- **Indicators should be specific to the SDG targets.**
  The more specific an indicator is, the more efficient it will be in measuring progress and changes through time. To integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development, indices with specific indicators addressing aspects of these dimensions could apply. Although this will result in a fairly large number of indicators, this is to be expected given the universality and complexity of the SDGs framework.

- **One target may need numerous indicators.**
  One target refers to several variables. Indicators are therefore needed to measure all those variables which, together have the potential to lead to the achievement of the target. See example from the List of proposed preliminary indicators (February 2015):

  **Target 6.5 By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate**
  *Proposed Indicator 1: Status of IWRM Implementation*
  *Proposed Indicator 2: Availability of operational arrangements for transboundary basin management*

- **Indicators should link multiple targets across the different goals.**
  The same indicator may be relevant to various targets. Linking single indicators to several targets may promote integration among the different dimensions of sustainable development. Where opportunities exist to derive indicators against multiple SDG targets from single underlying data sources, these should be welcomed and even prioritized.

- **The indicators framework should be built on existing indicators and processes currently designing indicators.**
  Throughout the years, many indicators were developed to track achievement of various international obligations and/or to assess the status of the world more broadly. IUCN recommends that this wealth of information is taken into consideration as much as possible in the new indicators framework. Examples of important work to draw from are the MDGs indicators, the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership (which developed indicators for the Aichi Biodiversity Targets), indicators developed by the World Bank on governance, and those developed by IUCN on species and protected areas.
✓ **Indicators should rely on scientifically sound data.**
To fully measure progress, the indicators need to draw on scientifically sound data sets. Many important data sets having gone through peer review processes are already available. These should be part and parcel of the monitoring and reporting framework. IUCN is ready to put at the disposal of this process its vast knowledge and experience in designing and applying these types of indicators related to biodiversity.

✓ **Standardized processes for gathering and analyzing data need to be put in place.** Common methodologies to apply indicators at the national level allow for aggregation and comparing data at the global level.

✓ **Data deficiency and lack of technical capacity of national statistical institutions and other relevant stakeholders should be addressed.**
Data deficiency is a major obstacle to monitoring. However, lack of data cannot be used as a justification for not measuring progress. Mechanisms to identify and respond to gaps to measure targets should be put in place. There are numerous credible civil society organizations and agencies that hold such data and/or have the capacity to fill the identified gaps. In addition, capacity building for national statistical institutions should be designed and put at the service of increasing generation and application of data to respond to the policy demand.