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A Transformational Indicator Framework for a Society for All of All Ages

The post-2015 sustainable development framework aims to be universal and to leave no one behind. For this to become a reality, its indicators must support the means by which Member States deliver a society that meets the needs and rights of persons of all ages everywhere.

Today's children and youth are tomorrow's older persons. People aged 60 and over now make up nearly 12% of the global population, rising to 16% by 2030 and to 21% by 2050. Women aged fifty and over are already 23.2% of the world's women.

The commitment to leave no one behind and to universality gives clear guidance for the development and adoption of indicators. A universal framework is not business as usual. Indicators must be specific enough to ensure that we can measure success across all social groups and for all countries. Indicators for the framework should be both based on existing data sets and on future ones yet to be developed, and be suitable, feasible and relevant for our ageing world.

As we move forward we must guard against the significant risk that limiting the number of indicators could result in a framework that is unbalanced and favours some groups over others.

Why disaggregating data by age in the framework is a priority

The February 2015 Expert Group Meeting on the Indicator Framework for the Post-2015 Development Agenda stated: "Elements of disaggregation should be considered from the start of the process of developing the indicators." We fully support the inclusion of language "disaggregated by sex and age group" in many of the proposed indicators and ask Member States to call for disaggregated data for all older age groups.

Even though age and age-related targets are mentioned in nine of the 17 proposed goals and in a number of targets, and even though there are various references to "for all", "all" and "lifelong", age disaggregation across all age groups in the goals and targets is inconsistently applied.

Disaggregation is more than just a technical discussion. It goes to the heart of the human rights approach to achieve universality and leave no one behind. It determines how some specific targets and goals will be made meaningful. The existing integrated statistical frameworks and the indicators used for MDGs will not be sufficient or appropriate to support the ambition of the new framework.

Data must be fit for purpose

The challenge for older persons is that many data systems are simply inadequate. Data on older women and men are missing – often not collected, fully analysed, reported or utilised, leading to the absence of issues affecting older people in policies and development interventions. Reliance on outdated data sets which do not include those aged under 15 and aged over 49, for example, is already leaving millions behind.

Data gaps on age must be filled with new data covering age cohorts from 60 years and above. This is a key recommendation. Improved data disaggregation by age can be done by age bands, for example in five year segments from birth until death. Such action will significantly enhance global understanding of poverty, health status, marginalisation and vulnerability, as well as the economic and social contributions of people throughout their life course.

Older age and the proposed indicators

Some of the proposed indicators omit essential information on older persons:

- Goal 1, 'Ending Poverty in all its forms everywhere', has an indicator for target 1.5, on building resilience in the face of climate hazard and extreme events, which includes sex but not age.
- Goal 2, on hunger, target 2.2, refers explicitly to addressing the nutritional needs of older persons, but has indicators that are focused solely on children under the age of 5.
- Essential indicators to measure Goal 3 - 'Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages' - are missing. Despite UN data being available for all countries on life expectancy at birth and healthy life expectancy at 60, these indicators are not included. The indicator "Healthy life expectancy at age 60" should be there.
- Target 3.4 on NCDs has an indicator that excludes people over 70 years despite this being the age group most affected by NCDs.
- Goal 4, on education and lifelong learning for all has an indicator under target 4.4., which puts an arbitrary age limit on formal and non-formal education, which is in direct contradiction to the stated goal of providing lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- Goal 5 on gender requires a number of indicators to make older women more visible to combat the violence and discrimination they face due to their age.
- Target 5.2's indicators for the elimination of violence against women and girls are discriminatory and unacceptable. Excluding women over 49 leaves out over 23% of the female population.

The litmus test for the success of the SDGs is that all people across their life course will be reached. The policies needed to achieve the goals cannot be developed and their eventual success measured without improved disaggregated data by age across the life course, nor without including all those who have been marginalized from development.

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