



SDGs Progress Assessment; comparing apples with what?

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Abstract:

With just under a decade left to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), countries around the world endeavour to understand if their current pace of progress is fast enough to achieve their 2030 targets and where acceleration or course correction is needed. Many international development organizations have supported such efforts by developing various frameworks to measure progress of countries and regions on the SDGs. This has created a useful dialogue on whether this diversity of proposed approaches is a sign of inconsistency and to what extent it may confuse, rather than assist, countries in monitoring implementation of the SDGs. This paper looks at a selected number of measures developed by four different organizations and aims to shed light on the source of differences and highlight where harmonization is most necessary. It identifies three types of difference: evidence base (indicator, data and targets), concepts (understanding of progress concepts), and techniques (indexing, target setting, projections etc). The paper places more emphasis on the concepts (second source) and argues that the reason for inconsistency in results is more likely to be driven by different understandings of the progress concepts, highlighting that this has to be a priority in order for any harmonization to be successful. In other words, when the same concept is measured in different ways (e.g. different normalization techniques applied), the results are unlikely to lead to conflicting comparisons. Similarly, when two different aspects of progress are well-defined, properly measured and clearly communicated, results are more immune to misinterpretation. But a recipe for confusion is understanding and measuring one question about progress assessment in different ways without clear communication of the underlying concepts to users. Therefore, the harmonization of evidence base and statistical techniques are necessary but insufficient for orchestrating SDG progress assessment efforts, without a common understanding of concepts. Careful choice of terms and understanding, as well as clear communication of underlying concepts is fundamental as its absence will leave users in the dark regardless of sound and sophisticated statistical methods.

Keywords:

Sustainable Development Goals; progress assessment; SDG indicators; normalization

1. Introduction:

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2. Methodology:

<Methodology>

3. Result:

<Result>

4. Discussion and Conclusion:

<Discussion and Conclusion>

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