

Monitoring Advisory Group (MAG)
Review of the GPEDC Monitoring Framework and Indicators
February 2016

Introduction

Track Three of the MAG's work plan is to provide advice to the GPEDC Co-Chairs and Steering Committee on the continued relevance and usefulness of the GPEDC monitoring framework:

- a) Review the strengths and weaknesses of current indicators and identify ways to strengthen them; and
- b) Reviewing the monitoring framework to ensure its conceptual relevance to post-2015 SDG and AAAA accountability efforts.

The MAG's advice will be based on MAG expertise and discussions of each indicator as well as the experience of country coordinators and focal points in carrying out the second monitoring round.

The MAG initiated this review process at its February 2016 meeting. Three MAG working groups (ownership and results indicators; inclusive development indicators; transparency and accountability indicators) are assessing indicators in relation to relevance, efficiency and usefulness:

- **Relevance:** Is the indicator measuring something valid, meaningful and relevant in relation to the intended Busan commitment(s) and principles?
- **Efficiency:** Is the indicator reliable for assessing progress? Can the indicator be measured efficiently and over time? Can the indicator encourage multi-stakeholder engagement in the collection of data and in the verification of findings?
- **Usefulness:** Do the stakeholders see the indicator as useful and effective in furthering behaviour change in relation to the Busan commitment and realizing significant outcomes and impacts for effective development cooperation? Is the indicator drawing attention to key stakeholder practices in ways that inform multi-stakeholder dialogue and increase accountability? Is the monitoring process contributing to incentives for all relevant actors to change?

The MAG has produced a draft commentary and proposals for each indicator. These documents are posted on the [MAG's Teamworks web site](#) for review and comments. Our advice will be finalized at the MAG's next meeting, June 4-6, in Paris.

Comments and suggestions are very welcome from GPEDC stakeholders. Comments can be provided on the site, or submitted to the MAG Chairperson, Brian Tomlinson (brian.t.tomlinson@gmail.com).

Each working group also highlighted a number of overarching issues that arose during the course of each group's discussions. This commentary can be found below.

General considerations on the GPEDC monitoring framework and process

1. MAG Working Group on Transparency and Accountability (Indicators 4, 5 and 7)

The sub-group working on indicators 4, 5 and 7 agreed on the continued relevance of the issues of transparency, predictability and mutual accountability to effective development cooperation. However, it was noted that the three indicators are measuring data that in themselves do not directly reveal whether the progress measured by the indicator will lead to improved and more effective development cooperation in countries, whether it includes non-traditional providers and ensures engagement with multiple actors. The current indicators provide no information on whether outcomes have improved on the ground.

One may argue that the monitoring framework was set up to provide data to demonstrate that behaviour change is happening and that it is too early to look for results at the level of improved development effectiveness and improved outcomes. But the GPEDC will need to demonstrate its contribution to outcomes at a certain moment of time, and it should look for evidence, data and linkages to its indicator data, and not only for indicators 4, 5 and 7 relating to transparency and accountability.

In general the indicators do not capture whether the Paris, Accra and Busan agreements have been translated into (where appropriate) implementation frameworks, policies, procedures and institutional arrangements, by aid providers and by countries. There is also no evidence that incentives are in place beyond publishing the data to promote behaviour change.

This gives cause for thought when looking at the relevance, effectiveness and usefulness of the indicators. If a target is not met, is it because it was unrealistic, or not useful, or is it a serious problem of lack of compliance? It is important to find out what the main barriers to change are, as it will need to be tackled when thinking through any possible changes to the indicator and its use.

Where there is slow progress, inadequate use, inadequate (institutional) capacity and inadequate compliance, we need to focus on why and what can potentially be done about it. In other words: the monitoring exercise should be used to find out more about why the targets are not being met and what the potential obstacles are. The HLM could focus on a way forward and, among others, explore the possibility of developing a set of interventions that could constitute an incentive system for the GPEDC framework. This could include elements of the following:

1. Special capacity development and technical support to countries for data collection, processing and reporting;
2. Annual meeting of National Coordinators and Focal Points for sharing experience and knowledge;
3. Standing technical advisory support to National Coordinators Focal Points on application of indicators;

4. Improved country level communication and awareness of the framework and indicators - sensitization of stakeholders beyond government and stakeholder focal points;
5. Organization of in-country meetings of national focal points – government, private sector and NGOs-based;
6. Conduct of a regular survey of focal points to identify issues, challenges areas of need, including technical and capacity development support.

These issues are also important regarding the significance of the GPEDC’s monitoring framework in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals review. Debapriya Bhattacharya has explored this relationship in detail in the paper [“GPEDC indicators in the context of Agenda 2030 and AAAA”](#). Deb’s paper points to a complementarity between the GPEDC indicators, which focus on evidence of behaviour change, and the SDG indicators, which will focus on results and outcomes. While the paper speaks for itself and should be taken up by the JST and co-chairs, three paragraphs are quoted here that underscore the need for a general perspective on the way forward for the GPEDC indicator framework.

“In order to implement the highly ambitious 2030 Agenda there has to be a drastic change in behaviour and attitude from all stakeholders/actors engaged in international development cooperation nationally, regionally or globally. This calls for some significant changes, among others, in the way the global development cooperation is conducted currently. In that sense, Global Partnership for Effective Co-operation (GPEDC) efforts can become an important element of the Means of Implementation (Mol) of the envisaged global partnership. The question is whether the GPEDC monitoring framework can play a role in triggering and/or promoting such changes.

“Although there is significant overlap of the objectives of both GPEDC and the SDGs, some vital issues have not found necessary mention in the SDG document. Indeed, there is no mention of the term “mutual accountability” anywhere in the 2030 Agenda outcome document. Arguably, the conduct of international development cooperation in general, and that of the aid providers have not been adequately underscored in the SDG document. The GPEDC Monitoring Framework, therefore can effectively contribute to the effective implementation as well as “Review and Follow-up” of the SDGs by substantively complementing (if not by addressing a serious fault line of) the SDG framework. By focusing on the effectiveness and behavioural change of the parties in international development cooperation, the GPEDC monitoring framework will act as a complementary, but autonomous mechanism for enhancing effectiveness of the Means of Implementation and monitoring the SDG progress.

“The GPEDC follow-up process has to be integrated with the SDG and AAAA review and follow-up process. This would assure that the process of monitoring development cooperation at the global, regional, national and local level would be strengthened and consolidated. The GPEDC has to act as a complementary monitoring framework for reviewing the means of implementing the SDGs relating to development cooperation. As the indicator list for the SDGs is not finalised yet, further analytical work needs to be done by the GPEDC to be more consistent and coherent with the SDG

indicators. However, success of these potential efforts will greatly depend on the political will of the providers and technical capacity of the recipient countries.”

While these considerations can lead to important and structural changes in the indicator framework and the future of the GPEDC monitoring process, the current monitoring round should already include preparatory work for such a change, to ensure an HLM meeting that can be productive and ensure the relevance of the GPEDC indicators and monitoring process for Agenda 2030 and the implementation of the SDGs. MAG proposals on the individual indicators point to some ways forward.

2. MAG Working Group on Inclusive Development (Indicators 2, 3 and 8)

In addressing these three indicators the working group on inclusive development have focussed in particular on two issues:

1. Inclusiveness. Our concern with the current iterations of all these indicators is that they could quite easily be ‘gamed’ – that an artificial picture could be presented. We have therefore focussed on ensuring that the process for each indicator is as inclusive as possible: In particular how can minority and dissenting voices be heard.
2. Practicability. There is a need to ensure that the indicators can actually be made to work at country level – that appropriate data and information can in practice actually be collected. We have therefore focussed on looking at how this can be achieved, and each indicator be utilised in a practical way by local contact-points who will often be under-resourced and over-stretched.

3. MAG Working Group on Ownership and Results (indicators 1, 6, 9, and 10)

In a small town, a priest and a driver died on the same day. Both had an interview with Saint Peter. At the end of the day, the driver entered Heaven and the priest is sent to Hell. The priest complaints: “I attended church every day and this driver never learned how to drive, he put in danger all his clients; he was a terrible driver, what happened?” Saint Peter says: “Dear son, while you were preaching in mass, all your parishioners were sleeping. But every time this guy was driving, all the people, inside and outside the car, were praying. It’s all about results”

When the focus of a process is on means, and not on ends, it is very easy not to pay attention to final results. This has been rather common for international development co-operation and aid. Usually the main focus has been, both for providers and for recipients, on the amount of money spent on development co-operation. We can see various examples in history where international aid has not had an impact on development in a specific country, in spite of the amount of resources spent over the years.

That is why the Paris Declaration, and the articulation in Addis Ababa (Financing for Development) of the Busan principles are so important today. These ideas underline the need to go beyond resources spent on development co-operation, and to focus on results (development) and to try to understand the theory of change behind that complex process. The [MAG has a Discussion Paper](#) on an implied theory of change relevant to the GPEDC.

With this in mind, the Post-Busan Interim Group (PBIG), endorsed by the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness, proposed a monitoring framework for development co-operation. In 2012 the GPEDC put together ten indicators for that purpose. Some of these indicators are about results.

This MAG working group focuses on those indicators related to Busan principles on results and on countries' ownership of development co-operation. The first principle underlines the importance that the design and implementation of development co-operation projects should focus on development goals. The second principle implies, correctly, that the recipient country should decide those goals. These are indicators 1, 6, 9 and 10 of the GPEDC of the monitoring framework.

Both principles and the inclusion of indicators 1, 6, 9 and 10, suggest that an important assumption behind this monitoring process is that the main drivers of development are not providers, but developing countries. The MAG believes this approach is the right one.

There are numerous examples where aid has been delivered without including the point of view and the guidance of the recipient country, and the impact in the medium and long run has not been favourable.¹ This theory suggest that when aid is driven by the specific needs of the recipient country, when local stakeholders participate in the decision of priorities and the type of co-operation needed and when development co-operation uses and strengthens the recipient country's administrative systems, long-run sustainable development occurs.

For this reason, the idea of including this type of indicators is a good choice in principle, which contrasts with the old idea that those who knew best what developing countries needed were developed countries and northern donors.

In the next section this MAG working group sets out some reflections on certain elements of the monitoring framework as a whole, which arose in their discussion of indicators.

Commentary on the monitoring framework as a whole

Development is not about the amount of money or the number of projects delivered to developing countries. In many cases, this approach has been even harmful for recipient countries. That is why the agreements in Paris, Accra and Busan, among others in the past ten years, are so important, especially those related to focus on results and on the idea that development comes from within countries.

¹ Easterly, W. "The Tyranny of Experts" Basic Books. New York, NY. 2014.

For the same reason monitoring and evaluating development co-operation (and local resources) is also important. It is important but it is not easy. As happens with other areas, constructing indicators and evaluation tools to understand complex phenomena takes time and is sometimes frustrating.

Monitoring and evaluating development co-operation is rather new. It is essential to carry on measuring this complex field and learning to improve.

Indicators 1, 6, 9 and 10, as a whole, make a relatively good set of tools to understand and guide better aid. They are not perfect, they will never be perfect, but there can be improvements in the next monitoring rounds if they can be changed according to systematic findings. The current round may also be able to detect with these indicators some elements of ownership and results. These indicators will, up to a certain point, also assess the quality of financial management systems, and the information capacity of governments.

However, there are some concerns that the monitoring framework might undermine its own effectiveness by negatively affecting actor's behaviour, diminishing the attainment of development outcomes and results, which is the whole purpose of development co-operation:

- a) The first concern is that the exercise is entirely voluntary. We understand the complexities in trying to monitor development co-operation in a compulsory basis. But it would be a major drawback if at the second High Level Meeting in Nairobi, it is apparent that the principles of Busan, Accra and Paris, are not met by a significant number of recipient countries, or by important provider countries and agencies. What would be the purpose of the exercise if the scope of the monitoring process does not show some progress in reaching important actors? How would this influence future norm setting?
- b) A second concern, related to the previous one, is that the exercise stresses learning, but not accountability as much. And the way people change behaviour in general is about incentives, positive and negative ones. A government and its people may not have incentives to change if nothing happens when they do a good job in terms of developing co-operation processes.

It may be difficult to tackle these two problems, but perhaps through the way the monitoring framework is presented, there might be means to show and reward countries and providers who improve their behaviour, in terms of this monitoring exercise and in terms of realizing development results. Some suggestions include for instance making public the countries and providers who decided to participate in the monitoring exercise and those who did not; giving public awards to good behaviour, ranking providers and countries according to different outcomes. The GPEDC team may think that these types of incentives will not change the behaviour of important actors, both in size and in number. If such is the case, then the implication is that it will be necessary to adopt a set of positive and negative incentives to try to change the behaviour of all actors: providers, recipient countries (finance and social ministries, operational units).

- c) A third concern is that it seems, for both recipient countries and providers, the monitoring framework may be burdensome, despite the good will of Paris, Accra and Busan. And this is the case both for low-income and for middle-income countries. The culture of getting information for the indicators, and co-ordination with all affected actors, has not taken hold. If the exercise is entirely voluntary, changing this culture and behaviour will be very slow. The previous indicators, under the Paris Declaration, included for example fragmentation of development co-operation in recipient countries, but this important element appears missing in today's framework, in part because of the problems that countries have in gathering relevant information for this indicator. A related issue is the extent to which countries and providers should provide content to allow disaggregation in analysing progress. Minimizing the burden in carrying out the monitoring needs to be balanced against the value of what may be gained for learning from detail and disaggregation.
- d) A fourth concern issue the focus of the framework on the way recipient countries and providers interact, and not on a link with development results, in order to measure the effectiveness of development co-operation. This concern points to the importance of linkages between the GPEDC monitoring and progress in achieving the SDGs.
- e) A final concern is the responsibility and the attribution problem. There can be some confidence in identifying who might be responsible for progress of each indicator in a very broad sense.² But it gets slippery as to who is the responsible institution or even person to produce and improve performance of these indicators.

For example, various sectors receive and offer development co-operation in middle-income countries. There might even be development co-operation agencies and competent finance ministries involved in development cooperation. But who is the one responsible to collect all the information for a certain indicator? If this may be confusing, determining who is the responsible for improving the indicator is even more confusing.

Moreover, the links between the monitoring indicators and their associated development outcomes are many and so the chain is long with many actors involved and many intermediary causality links in between. Who is responsible for getting development results? Sometimes this is hard to determine.

All these concerns are working against the effectiveness of the GPEDC monitoring framework. Perhaps the best way forward is both to rigorously assess this exercise in order to learn from it, and to focus more clearly on a relevant overall theory of change.

Development is a complex process, which is different from country to country. Causality also changes with time. The causal chain of development is always a moving target. For this reason the

² See Dap Bhattacharya, "GPEDC indicators in the context of Agenda 2030 and AAAA and SDGs" 2016.

monitoring (and evaluation) approach need to be thoroughly thought through. In this regard, the MAG produced a Discussion Paper (December 2015) offering its critical vision on the GPEDC theory of change. It is important to recall some of the elements of this Paper:

- The key challenge is to be able to explain how, in practice, high level oversight discussions translate into behavioural change. This black box needs to be better explained by the GPEDC. For example, is it through improved knowledge and skills, strengthened national and domestic political commitments and processes? How would this political economy process actually occur? As to enhance national capacities, how are these key ingredients strengthened through GPEDC oversight and country-focused monitoring? What new capacities do providers need to help support partner countries and commit to behaviour change themselves? What are the mechanisms that address these issues?
- How can the political economy realities in which development happens be better reflected in the approaches and tools that the GPEDC employ to realize its principles for effective development cooperation? At various stages – from the domestic priorities of traditional donor governments to the structural challenges in recipient countries – hard political realities and decisions will be at least as important for what happens in the development space as any commitment to a global framework.
- With respect to the Busan commitment to mutual accountability (§35) and subsequent practice in monitoring, it is not clear whether GPEDC's key aim is to collect data to be able to evaluate the relative performance of different countries in delivering greater effectiveness; or whether it is to do so in order to be able to establish mutual accountability or generate examples of best practice that can inform the process of effecting change elsewhere. It need not be a binary choice, but greater clarity about what is intended for the monitoring framework is needed.
- There is a need to ensure that high-level political discussions in the Steering Committee and in High Level Meetings are informed by a nuanced synthesis of country level evidence. The global discussions need both to learn from what has worked in effecting change at a local level, but also develop a better understanding of what factors inhibit reform and the solutions to overcome some of these challenges. Generalised discussions at a global level will be less relevant if not informed by the granularity of country-level insights.

In short, it is important to keep finding ways to measure development co-operation properly. But crucially all parties need to keep upmost that development co-operation goes beyond resources and beyond monitoring. It's all about development results.