

BRIEFING NOTE

Bottom-up Accountability for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Are subnational indicator systems aligned?

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Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) build on the Millennium Development Goals set in 2000 and intend to complete any their unfinished targets. The SDGs aim to achieve the human rights of all people, with a special focus on gender equality for women and girls. The goals are an integrated balance of all three domains of sustainable development: the economy, society and the natural environment.

There are 17 SDGs with 169 corresponding targets that are integrated and indivisible (see Figure 1).

Current international efforts focus on developing a set of indicators to measure progress toward the 169 targets. Based on a series of governmental, expert and stakeholder discussions, 231 SDG indicators have been identified¹—151 of which are considered well-established indicators already reported on by many statistical agencies.



Figure 1. Sustainable Development Goals

Source: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>

¹ The full list of indicators can be found in: UN Economic and Social Council. 2016. E/CN.3/2016/2/Rev.1*, available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/47th-session/documents/2016-2-IAEG-SDGs-Rev1-E.pdf>.



It is expected that the SDG indicators will become a common reference point for national and subnational monitoring. Though many of the indicators will only be reported at a national level, many will be based on data collected at the subnational level, and it is intended that, where relevant, all indicators be disaggregated by geographic location. Ultimately, there remain many questions about how monitoring will be done at the subnational level, how data will be aggregated, and how to manage the collection and reporting of such a large number of indicators.

In this briefing note we use two provincial indicator sets (the Province of Manitoba's Sustainable Development Indicators, and Green Economy Indicators) as a test case for evaluating alignment with the SDG indicators, to see if they are reporting on similar types of indicators and themes, and to examine the extent to which subnational indicators may align with the SDG indicators.

Are we ready to monitor SDGs at the provincial level?

The Province of Manitoba's sustainable development indicators aim to "provide Manitobans with timely, accurate information on important sustainability issues and trends. It is a way of monitoring Manitoba's sustainability by tracking and interpreting key indicators in the province's many sectors. By studying and reporting on these indicators over time, Manitobans can be kept informed about the progress taking place and be encouraged to participate in the long-term strategies for sustainable development in Manitoba" (Government of Manitoba, 2009, p.2).

The provincial green economy indicators are intended to track progress in the greening of Manitoba's economy over time. They reflect the state of the environment (at a high level), as well some key pressures on the environment (i.e., what is causing changes in the state of the environment) as they relate to the economy / economic sectors.

Though the two indicator sets are not formally linked, significant alignment between the green economy indicators and sustainable development indicators is apparent. The sustainable development

indicator set covers a broader set of categories than the green economy indicators, which contain only a few indicators not in alignment with the focus of the sustainable development indicators, but often have a deeper focus. For the remainder of this document, we group the two indicator sets under the term "Sustainable Development and Green Economy Indicators".

Indicator types reported at the subnational and global levels

We started with an analysis of indicator types, grouping the indicators into four broad categories: (1) State indicators that give a sense of how we are doing in a particular domain (e.g., state of the environment); (2) Finances indicators that give a sense of how financial resources are being allocated; (3) Policy indicators that track whether a particular framework, agreement, or policy is in place; and (4) Management indicators that track the extent to which best practices or programs are implemented, or evaluate the performance of programs. These three latter indicator types are used as proxies to measure management activities, rather than actual states.

It is immediately apparent from the figures that the provincial indicator sets are structured differently from the SDG indicators, as they contains no finance or policy indicators (see Figure 2). The provincial indicator sets do include some management-type indicators (e.g., Adoption of sustainable agricultural management practices). Policy and financial indicators included in the SDGs seem to have a direct relevance to subnational governments despite their low representation in the provincial indicator set. For example, SDG policy and financial indicators include the proportion of local governments that adopt and implement local disaster risk reduction strategies or spending on essential services (education, health and social protection) as a percentage of total government spending. These indicators can be included in subnational indicator sets.



The differences in the two indicator sets may relate to the availability of better data in developed countries like Canada (even at the subnational level) on state indicators measuring actual changes in the issues areas of interest such as changes in water quality, educational attainment rates, forest cover and land-use change.

Indicator alignment

In assessing the opportunity for indicator alignment, we searched first for thematic alignment, followed by a more detailed look at the individual targets and indicators associated with the goals to see where indicators aligned most closely. We were looking for close thematic alignment, rather than exactly identical indicators. For instance, one SDG indicator is “Mortality of cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes or chronic respiratory disease” (an indicator identified to track progress in reducing premature mortality from non-communicable diseases). The provincial sustainable development and green economy indicators include a different, broader indicator to capture premature mortality (potential years of life lost) as a measure of overall health status. These indicators were considered aligned.

The identified thematic alignment is presented in Figure 3. Thematic coverage was fairly good; 22 per cent of the Manitoba sustainable development indicators and 20 per cent of the green economy indicators were considered aligned or somewhat aligned with the SDG indicators.

The gaps identified through the analysis are also of interest – there was no alignment identified for six of the 17 SDGs, and for seven of the 19 thematic categories. Some of these gaps are unsurprising (e.g., no indicators related to Partnerships for the goals), whereas others present an opportunity to cover additional sustainability aspects.

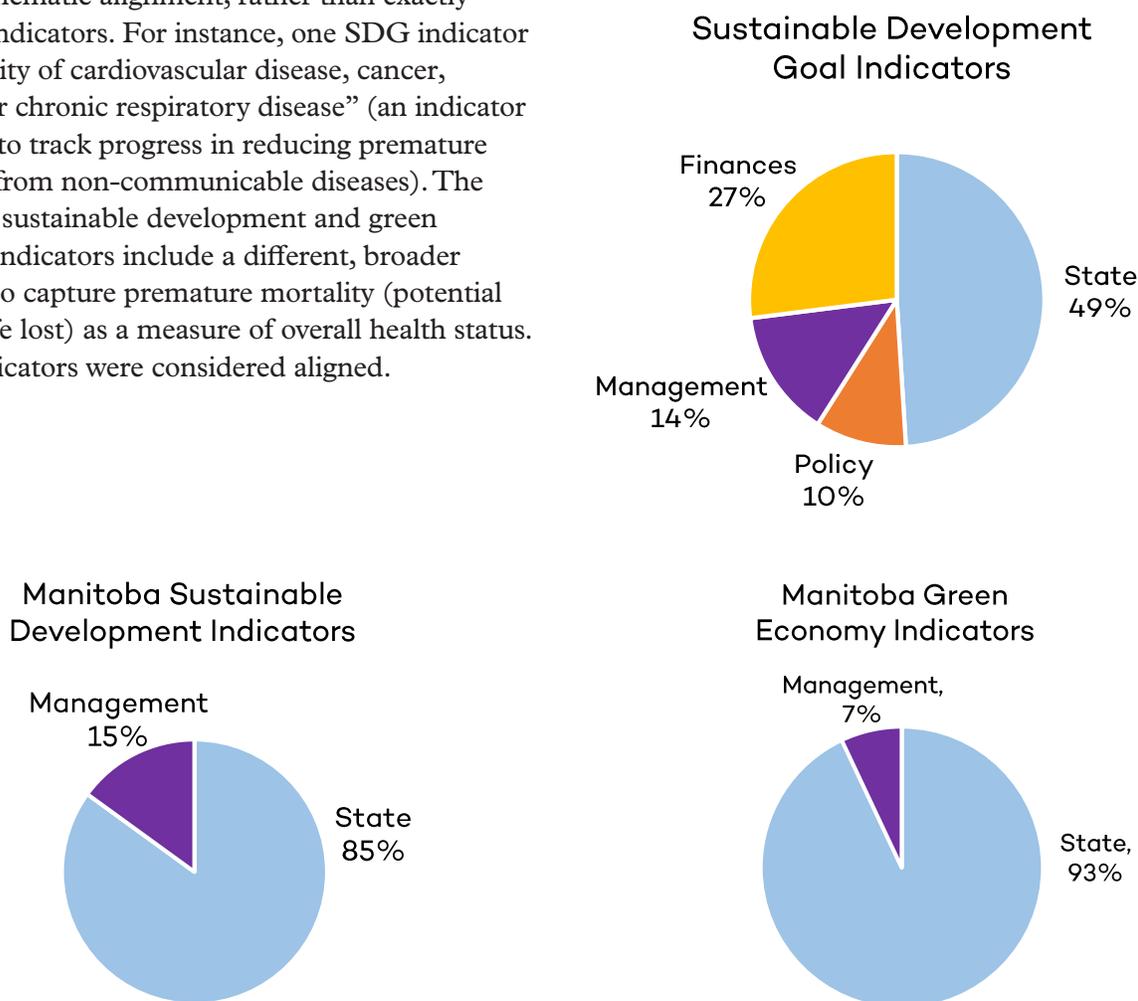


Figure 2. Indicator types: SDGs, Manitoba sustainable development and green economy indicators



Sustainable Development and Green Economy Indicators

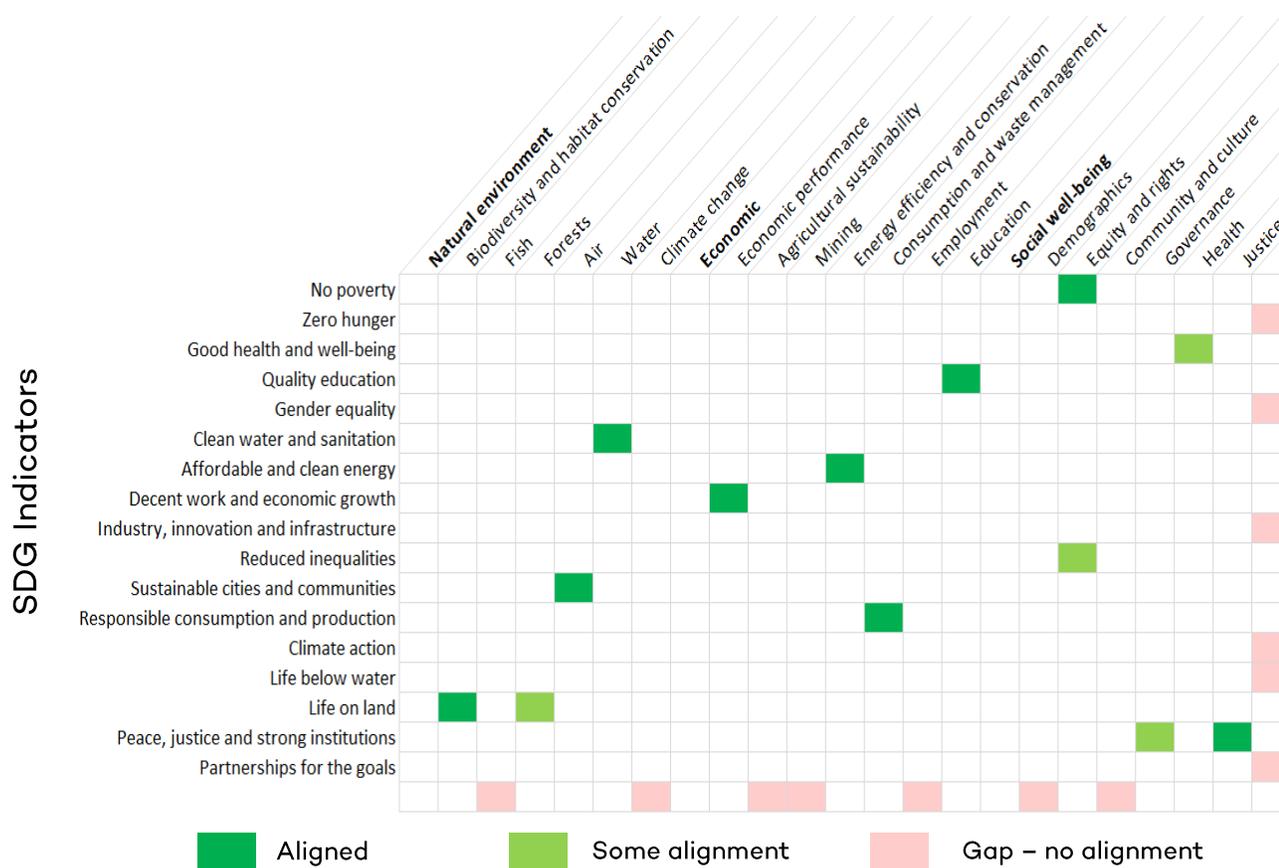


Figure 3. Linkages between SDG indicators and MB Sustainable Development and Green Economy Indicators

What are the key gaps between the SDG and subnational indicators?

Ultimately, there remain many questions about how monitoring will be implemented at the subnational level, how data will be aggregated, and how the collection and reporting on such a large number of indicators will be managed. However, by using the Province of Manitoba’s Sustainable Development and Green Economy Indicators as a test case for evaluating alignment with the SDG indicators, we were able to show that the typology of indicators between the SDG indicators and subnational indicators may vary significantly. In the case we examined, there was no alignment beyond state-type indicators.

Thematically, the provincial Sustainable Development and Green Economy Indicators demonstrated strong alignment with the SDG indicators (>20 per cent of provincial indicators aligned with SDG indicators). Further, with some minor adjustment, it would be possible to report on indicators related to most goals. The comparison identified some areas where there is the potential for additional measures (Table 1).



Table 1. Gaps related to Sustainable Development Goals relevant for the subnational context

Sustainable Development Goal	Comments
Zero hunger	Relates to food security. Some sample indicators from the SDGs: (1) Prevalence of undernourishment; (2) Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale; (3) Proportion of agricultural area under productive and sustainable agriculture.
Gender equality	Some provincial sustainable development and green economy indicators are disaggregated by gender, which ties into equity. Some example indicators from the SDGs: (1) Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments; (2) Proportion of women in managerial positions.
Industry, innovation and infrastructure	Some examples from the SDGs: (1) Share of the rural population who live within 2 km of an all-season road; (2) CO ₂ emissions per unit of value added; (3) Research and development expenditure as a percentage of GDP.
Climate action	Relates to actions to be taken, not about actual performance on emissions. Examples: (1) Number of countries that have integrated mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning into primary, secondary and tertiary curricula. (2) Number of deaths, missing persons and persons affected by disaster per 100,000 people.

Finally, in order to contribute to the bottom-up accountability and reporting on SDGs, it is critically important to align subnational indicator systems so they can be aggregated at the national level into country-level SDG progress reporting. Here, national statistical and other data collection agencies play an important role in fostering this alignment.

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