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Measuring and Fostering the Progress of Societies

Second OECD World Forum
on *Statistics, Knowledge and Policy*

Istanbul, 27-30 June 2007

In association with:



International
Statistical
Institute



Partnership in
Statistics for
Development in
the 21st century



Statistical,
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Introduction

Around the world, societies are increasingly concerned with their quality of life. And a consensus is growing around the need to develop a more comprehensive view of progress – one that takes into account social, environmental and economic concerns - rather than focussing mainly on economic indicators like Gross Domestic Product, which, while an important measure of economic activity, was not developed to be the sole measure of a nation's progress. There is also a broad recognition that the development of cross-cutting, high quality, shared, accessible information about how a society is doing is crucial to ensure that decision-making is simultaneously responsive and responsible at all levels (policy makers, businesses, citizens, etc.). But, in an age of unprecedented, and overwhelming, information flows, the common understanding necessary for informed public discourse is often inadequate.

In response, organisations all over the globe are developing comprehensive measures of a society's progress (or sustainability, wellbeing or quality of life – all terms closely linked to progress). Work is being done at the sub-national, national, and international levels, undertaken by the public, private and citizen sectors, academia, and the media, sometimes in collaboration. The knowledge base developed in the context of the OECD project contains hundreds of initiatives, both in developed and in developing countries, at international, national and sub-national levels.

Many challenges are emerging as this work unfolds. Globalisation is making the measurement and assessment of a country's overall progress an issue requiring statistical and analytical approaches that go beyond national borders. Civil society is increasingly taking the lead in calling for – and even building – sets of progress measures. These challenges are putting pressure on all parts of society to find new ways of working with one another to improve their understanding and assessment of societal progress. This collaboration crosses national borders and spans sectors – governments, for instance, are seeking new ways to collaborate with civil society. But until now there has been no “global” discussion about how to do this.

Measuring and Fostering the Progress of Societies Istanbul, June 27-30, 2007

In June 2007 an exceptional group of 900 people will gather in Istanbul. They will come from across the developed and developing world, and will span the public, private and civil sectors. They will comprise ministers, parliamentarians and senior public servants; eminent academics and the leaders of civil society; senior business leaders, the development sector and representatives from the media. And they will come together to assess and foster the progress of their societies. Thousands of others are expected to follow the discussion through live webcast.

The second OECD World Forum will build on the success of its predecessor, held in 2004 in Palermo (Italy). Attended by 540 people from 43 countries, the Forum was the first international discussion about improving the use of statistics for evidence-based decision making and developing a shared, facts-based knowledge about the progress of societies, a cornerstone of any modern democracy.

The second World Forum will be a much larger event, in several ways:

- numbers of people - 900 are expected in Istanbul;
- diversity of nationality - this second world forum will be truly global in its scope; and
- breadth of planning - several international workshops on specific issues have been - and will be - run to help prepare the Forum. "Regional pre-conferences" will help to engage countries outside of the OECD. Pre-conferences were held, or are being held, in Latin America (Colombia, 12-13 October 2006), Africa (Rwanda, 14 January 2007), Asia (Korea, 8-9 February 2007), Middle East and Russia.

More information is available on the
OECD World Forum website:
<http://www.oecd.org/oecdworldforum>

Some speakers already confirmed include:

- Esko Aho, President of the Finnish National Fund for Research and Development, Former Prime Minister of Finland
- Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa, President of the United Nations General Assembly
- Joaquín Almunia, European Commissioner
- François Bourguignon, Chief Economist and Senior Vice President of the World Bank
- Kemal Dervis, UNDP Administrator
- Nick Donofrio, Executive Vice-President, Innovation and Technology, IBM
- Amir Dossal, Executive Director, UN Fund for International Partnerships
- Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Prime Minister of Turkey
- Harvey Fineberg, President of the Institute of Medicine, USA
- Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, President of Iceland
- Angel Gurría, Secretary-General of the OECD
- Richard Layard, London School of Economics
- Jacqueline Mc Glade, Director, European Environment Agency
- José Antonio Ocampo, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
- David M. Walker, Comptroller General of the United States
- Shirley Williams, House of Lords, UK
- Durmuş Yılmaz, Governor, Central Bank of Turkey

The conference will provide opportunities for in-depth discussions about the measurement of progress, as well as some of the most important concerns facing the world, such as climate change, health, and economic globalisation. It will stimulate an international dialogue based on available evidence, and at the same time expose gaps in our knowledge. It will be a place to discuss new and widely-applicable indicators to measure progress.

The second World Forum is part of a long-term project on measuring the progress of societies, and similar events are planned every two-three years hence. The “Mission Statement”, prepared at a high level strategic workshop in March 2006 at the Rockefeller Foundation’s Centre in Bellagio (Italy), says that:

The Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies exists to foster the development of sets of key economic, social and environmental indicators and their use to inform and promote evidence-based decision-making, within and across the public, private and citizen sectors. These indicator sets can be at the sub-national, national and international levels. The project is open to all sectors of society, building both on good practice and innovative research work, organised by the OECD in co-operation with national and international organisations.

The co-operation of the European Commission (EC), the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the United Nations (UN) and the World Bank (WB) confirms the global dimension of the project. The statistical offices of Turkey, Australia, Korea, Italy, Slovak Republic and Mexico, as well as the EC’s Joint Research Centre, are contributing to the overall project and to the organisation of regional conferences and thematic workshops. PARIS21 (the organisation created by EC, IMF, OECD, UN and WB to foster statistical capacity building in developing countries) and the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRTCIC) are supporting the participation of some countries in regional events and the Istanbul Forum. The International Statistical Institute is also providing intellectual and financial support.

The Forum will influence a diverse audience worldwide. For example, the International Association of Auditors General selected the topic “key indicators of progress” as one of the two key themes of their forthcoming World Meeting, to be held in Mexico City in September 2007, with an audience of 1500 delegates from all over the world. Similarly, the International Statistical Institute, at its 56th Session to be held in Lisbon in August 2007, has set aside a session to inform the global community of statisticians about the outcomes of the Istanbul conference.

The second OECD World Forum in more detail

The second World Forum will be an opportunity to learn more about the key facts, and policies surrounding the most important economic, social and environmental issues of our time. Keynote speakers, plenary sessions, parallel sessions, and technical workshops will allow participants to identify and discuss key measurement and policy issues. Issues relevant to developed, emerging and developing countries will be discussed. Results from regional events will be presented in the World Forum for further discussion.

The conference will be built around five broad themes, with each session relating to one or more themes.

Overarching sessions include:

- Measuring Progress: Does it Make a Difference for Policy making and Democracy?
- What is Progress?
- People's Perceptions vs. Reality: What impacts on Policies and Democracy?

1. Key Outcomes for Our Future: Measuring to Make Progress. What do we know, and what do we need to know, to track and foster progress in key dimensions of life?

- Progress in Democracy and Human Rights
- Power to the Planet: Energy for the Future
- Water: safety and sufficiency
- Biodiversity
- Human Capital: the Largest Share of a Nation's Wealth
- Poverty and Social Exclusion
- Meeting the World's Health Challenges
- Social Outcomes of Learning
- Financial Security and Stability
- Culture and Creativity

2. Mega-trends. What threats and opportunities do major societal changes mean for making progress in the 21st century?

- Climate Change
- Growing Old, Growing Young: Demographic Challenges
- Globalisation and Local Progress
- Surfing the Future: New Technology for Next Generation
- Skills on the Move: How Migration Affects National Progress
- The Gender Gap: Difference or Discrimination

3. Fostering Progress - the role of people and communities

- Tackling Global Problems: The Role of Foundations
- Statistical Offices: Information Brokers or Knowledge Builders?
- Citizens with vision: the Impact of Social Entrepreneurship
- Corporate Social Responsibility (The Role of Private Sector)
- Fostering Progress: The Role of Non-Profit Organisations
- Measuring Progress: Achieving Progress (The Role of International Organisations)

4. Making Progress in a Complex World. How can we better understand the links between things we do, the ways in which we organise ourselves, and our progress?

- Good Public Governance for Whom?
- Measuring Happiness and Making Policy
- Measuring and Improving Government's Performance
- Competitiveness, Innovation and Economic Growth
- How to Build a Knowledge Economy and How to Know When You Have One?

5. Turning statistics into knowledge and knowledge into policy: how can we strengthen the role of evidence in decision making throughout society?

- Evidence-Based Policy Making: Just a Myth or a Must?
- Building Statistical Capacity to Monitor the Progress of Societies
- Comprehensive Indicator Systems
- Turning Statistics into Knowledge
- Developing Countries: Better Statistics, Better Policy

The *Statistics, Knowledge and Policy* Value Chain

Information plays a vital role in economic and political processes. This information, coupled with the advancements in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has changed the ways in which markets and societies work. The Internet and other media have revolutionised the accessibility of information to citizens. And so the ideal of a “fully informed decision maker” could be a reality. Unfortunately, this is far from the case. As Einstein put it, “information is not knowledge” and although citizens are constantly bombarded by information, this bombardment does not necessarily create knowledge.

The way in which information is used by decision makers is extremely important. Research has demonstrated that the better an electorate is able to hold its policy makers accountable through evidence of their performance, the greater the incentives to policy makers to make better policy. And well thought-out indicators of progress help society to achieve better goals with fewer resources.

High quality data are a “public good”. And there is a wide consensus that their importance is higher than ever and that their production and dissemination help to improve social welfare. But in this “information age”, the availability of information does not automatically equate with increased knowledge. Disinformation spreads rapidly. Data based on shaky methodology can be quoted in public debate as “fact”. Even correct information can be misinterpreted, resulting in what some in the trade call “mutant statistics”. Gathering information is easy. Selecting the “right” information and turning it into knowledge is much harder.

Despite the efforts made by statisticians to produce reliable statistics, and by the media to disseminate them, the “statistics, knowledge and policy” chain is far from being well established in most countries. In truth, ideology, preconceptions, and biased or partial information can be major factors in determining what people think and how they evaluate the behaviour of policy makers.

Why Measure the Progress of Societies?

Reliable and objective statistics are the lifeblood of democracy. By providing citizens with accurate information about the result of past policies (i.e. economic and social outcomes) or the expected results of policies foreseen, they help the electorate decide on who should govern them. Of course, there are various ways to measure economic and social outcomes and it is common for the various parties participating in elections to make reference to different data. Therefore, a question is: could all parties agree on a “shared information set” that measured the overall progress of a nation, was widely read by citizens and used by all parties in the policy debate? Such data could bring remarkable improvements in the effectiveness and efficiency of the political game. But what should the “data space” contain, how should it be defined and by whom?

The most commonly used indicator of economic performance is growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), measured in both absolute and per-capita terms. However, collective decision making is a multi-dimensional process, with multiple objectives: if it were known that the GDP growth over several years came through damage to the environment, large increases in social inequalities or reduction in available assets, etc., citizens might choose to vote against a government responsible for these outcomes, rather than re-elect them.

Looking at the behaviour of OECD countries, it is quite clear that citizens want to reach a higher and more sustainable level of well-being. In several countries, this aspiration has been turned into concrete policies. These developments have served as an impetus for national statistical authorities and other data providers to design new theoretical frameworks to measure the overall progress of a country, as well as to enlarge the coverage of statistics, mainly on social and environmental phenomena.

Many approaches are possible but they generally fall into three broad types: the extension of the basic national accounts schemes to cover social and environmental dimensions; the use of a wide range of indicators referring to economic, social and environmental dimensions (the use of composite indicators to summarise them in a single number is also possible); the use of “subjective” measures of well-being, life-satisfaction or happiness.

First International Exhibition on “Innovative tools to transform information into knowledge”

This World Forum will be a true “knowledge experience” including the first international exhibition on innovative tools to help people to turn information into knowledge. Stands will be available to demonstrate innovative software and tools to disseminate data in a way to facilitate knowledge; and the world's best indicators systems will also be showcased. The exhibition will contain:

- *Animations*: based on a mix of dynamic maps and graphs, they are powerful tools that go beyond simple data presentation;
- *Videos*: films and videos have been developed by some organisations to explain the importance of the use of statistics in policy-making, to present concrete experiences aimed to foster progress of regions, communities, etc.;
- *Databases*: powerful databases with a high level of inter-country comparability have been developed by public and private organisations;
- *Web sites*: innovative web sites, blogs and interactive web-based tools have been created to discuss policies and debate the evidence provided by statistical indicators;
- *Software*: the Forum will be a unique opportunity for software companies to meet data users and present their latest products and services;
- *E-learning for statistics*: democracy requires informed citizens. Experiences to develop statistical e-learning courses/tools for citizens will be presented.
- *Comprehensive indicator systems*: there many successful indicator initiatives measuring progress at the local, regional, national, or international level.

Special focus will be given to creative and innovative proposals, with the best initiatives formally recognised during the conference.

If you are interested in having a stand, please contact oecdworldforum@oecd.org.

More information is available on the OECD World Forum website:
<http://www.oecd.org/oeecdworldforum>