

The Data Ecosystem for Sustainable Development in Colombia



GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP
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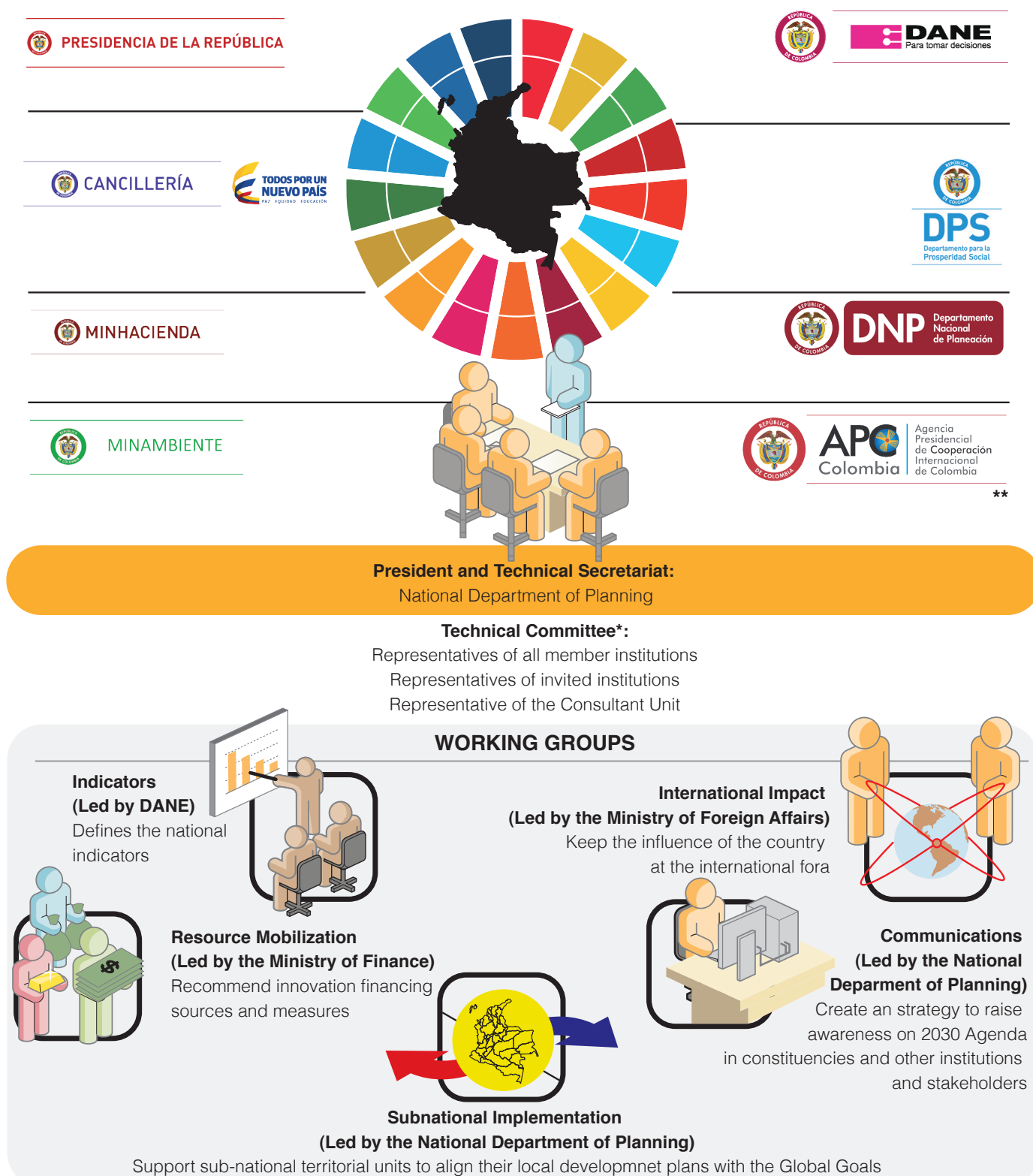
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The President of Colombia, Mr. Juan Manuel Santos, in 2015 committed himself, with other 192 world leaders, before the United Nations to the 2030 Agenda. Such commitment intends to achieve three main purposes in the next 15 years: eradicating extreme poverty, combating inequality and injustice and finding solutions to climate change.

Colombia has incorporated in its National Development Plan the preparation and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), with the establishment of the High Level Interinstitutional Commission (hereinafter the Commission), responsible for commanding these processes at national level. In his speech, when subscribing the Decree to create the Commission, President Santos asserted that, this was a milestone to ratify the decision which is “a pioneer in the World, not only to incorporate [the SDGs] in the National Development Plan, but also to ensure its effective implementation, through specific actions, specific plans, measurable plans”; and he also announced that approximately 200 of the indicators of the 2014 – 2018 National Development Plan are connected to of the 91 aims related to the Sustainable Development Goals, to wit, “more than half of the aims of such Goals are already incorporated to the Plan” (Colombia, 2015). Such Plan acquired the status of Law of the Republic, after its approval by the National Congress.



Graph No. 1: SDG Commission in Colombia. Members and structure.



*According to the Decree 230 of 2015

** Non-permanent member

The measurement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is directly connected to the data revolution, which is at the same time connected to the “transformation actions needed to meet the demands of an agenda that is complex to develop, thus improving the way in which data are produced and used; closing data gaps to avoid discrimination; generating data capacities and culture in terms of “Small data” and the analysis of Big data; modernizing data collection systems; disclosing data to promote transparency and accountability; developing new objectives and indicators” (Group-UN, 2016). This means working to serve the need for quality in the statistical information, at a higher level of disaggregation, with broader coverage, which serves both to measure progress and for the decision-making process based on evidence.

Under such a perspective, in order to follow-up on the progress of a transformative and multidimensional agenda, composed by 17 Goals, 169 aims and 241 global indicators¹, there is the need to have information to allow learning about the progress made both by the national government and the territorial governments, and also of the contributions of other actors, among which the private sector and the civil society are found. The country has approached different international scenarios to be part of the decision-making process on the methodology, measurement and prioritization of Global Goals and their indicators, and has shared the experience of the national environment with other countries.

Likewise, there was a space to reflect on the lessons learned while measuring the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), in particular on the weaknesses to collect information and the coverage of the same (information

on the territories), as well as in the institutional credibility in the data sources used to assess the realities and measure the impact of the public policies defined for its implementation.

Participating in such international scenarios, encouraged Colombia to generate initiatives to institutionalize actions under the guidance of the international community; joining efforts to conduct a preliminary diagnosis on the availability and quality of information, the involvement of different sectors and raising awareness towards a data culture.

To this end, a work group was created inside the Commission which is to be specifically devoted to the formulation and design of national indicators, and to promote the articulation of the different governmental entities to strengthen the statistical capacities connected to the Goals.

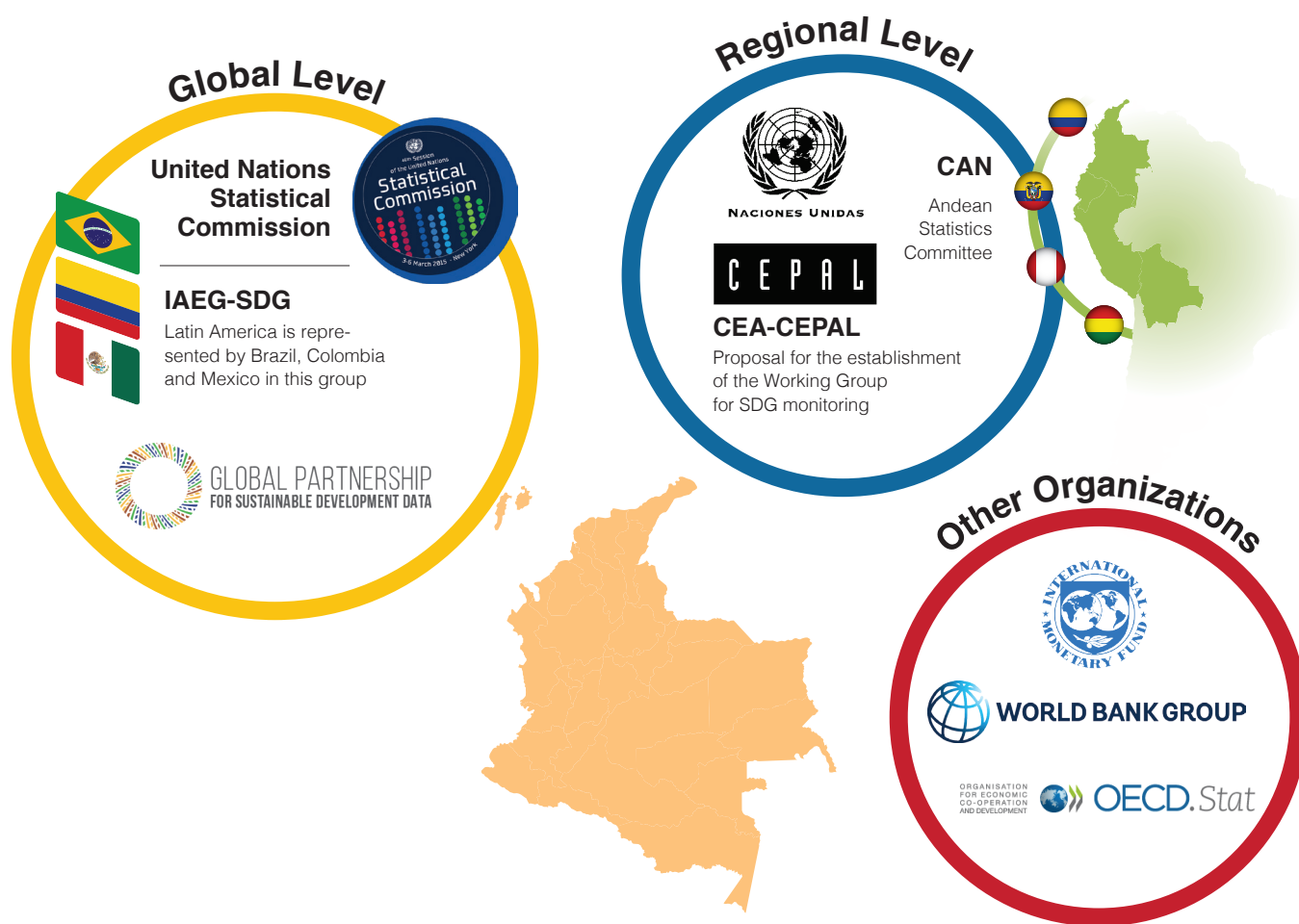
This group is working, under the guidance of the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE, for its acronym in Spanish), on the appropriation of global indicators while considering the national reality and fostering conversations among the actors involved in the collection of information to following-up on the Global Goals. This is performed while considering the alignment of Colombia with global guidelines for data generation.

Colombia is also committed before the United Nations to carry out a voluntary review on the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals before the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). Even if this group is not directly related with data, it does pose a challenge for the harmonization, standardization and production of the same.

¹ Number of proposed indicators presented in the meeting of the IAEG-SDG group held between March 30th 2016 and April 1st 2016. This group includes 15 indicators at different levels.



Graph No. 2. Participation of Colombia in international scenarios on Data for Sustainable Development



Source: CEPEI, 2016

In the international scenarios related to data, the country is represented by DANE, and participating at different levels of global, regional and subregional organizations. The aforementioned is a result of the obtained credibility and recognition for being at the forefront of the implementation of statistical standards and good practices, and, also thanks to the quality assurance methodology applied to the National Statistics System.²

The United Nations Statistical Commission is the highest level entity within the Global Statistics System, which brings together the directors of the Statistics National Offices. In 2015, the Commission expressed the need to create a group responsible for building the framework on global indicators for the Goals and aims of the Post-2015 Agenda (the 2030 Agenda today).³ DANE is a member of the Inter-Agency and Experts Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDG) of the United Nations Statistical Commission, representing Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Guyana and Suriname for the region of Central America and South America, together with Mexico and Brazil.

Likewise, at the regional level, there exists the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEA CEPAL for its acronym in Spanish)⁴, where Colombia has participated in several working groups that foster the improvement of the statistical information of the region and the conveyance of knowledge through South-South Cooperation. Within the framework of the Eighth Meeting of CEA the priority to begin activities

that allow measuring the Sustainable Development Goals and its main factors in the development of the countries of the region was discussed. Great importance was given to the preparation, for the first time, of a declaration called “Mitad del Mundo Declaration”, which included the following as its first item: “We reaffirm our commitment to generating good quality statistics to monitor national agendas and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (Americas, 2015).

The proposal of CEA is to advance in the establishment of a working group to follow-up on the SDG, to integrate the work done by IAEG-SDG and the High Level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for the follow-up activities conducted after 2015 (HLG). Through the process of establishing the group, there has been participation in discussions on the scope of activities aimed at measuring global indicators, an inventory of capacities for the production of information and institutional strengthening of the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean region.

In the Andean subregion, DANE is the Chair of the Andean Statistics Committee (CAE for its acronym in Spanish) for 2016, and such is the reason why DANE submitted before the General Secretariat of CAN a request to include activities that allow both monitoring the Goals and building subregional statistics aligned with the requirements of global indicators in the proposal of the Community Statistics Program (PEC as per its acronym in Spanish).

Given the importance of information for the SDGs, the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD) was created, aiming to build appropriate environments for data revolution to foster Sustainable

² A quality assessment to the statistical process is conducted which involves an improvement plan and the possibility to obtain a certification.

³ Terms of reference for the conformation of the group proposed in 2015.

⁴ CEPAL is one of the five regional commissions of the United Nations and CEA is a subsidiary organism of CEPAL, which is responsible for strengthening the statistical activity in the region.

Development. The representation of Colombia in this Partnership includes several stakeholders, such as: The Presidency of the Republic, the Chamber of Commerce of Bogotá (CCB for its acronym in Spanish), DANE and the Centro de Pensamiento Estratégico Internacional (CEPEI for its acronym in Spanish).

The Global Partnership has enabled to join efforts among member institutions and promoted the discussion on the data required to follow-up on the SDGs, thus attracting the attention of new so called “data champions”, by the Partnership to propose data initiatives.

Likewise, international organizations such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, among others, have joined the trend to contribute to follow-up the Sustainable Development Goals. However, their projects are not widely known and lack of specific work plans on how to interact with the international statistics and data community.

Participating at international level has increased the knowledge of institutions on the actions that the country must follow and to avail the opportunity given by the willingness of organizations such as the United Nations Population Fund, UN Women, World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF), among others, which have expressed their interest to conduct pilot programs to provide the national government with inputs to measure the SDGs.

Within the Colombian context, the actions proposed by DANE for the creation of the roadmap start at the National Statistics Plan (PEN for its acronym in Spanish), are oriented to conduct an analysis of the supply and demand of information to gather an

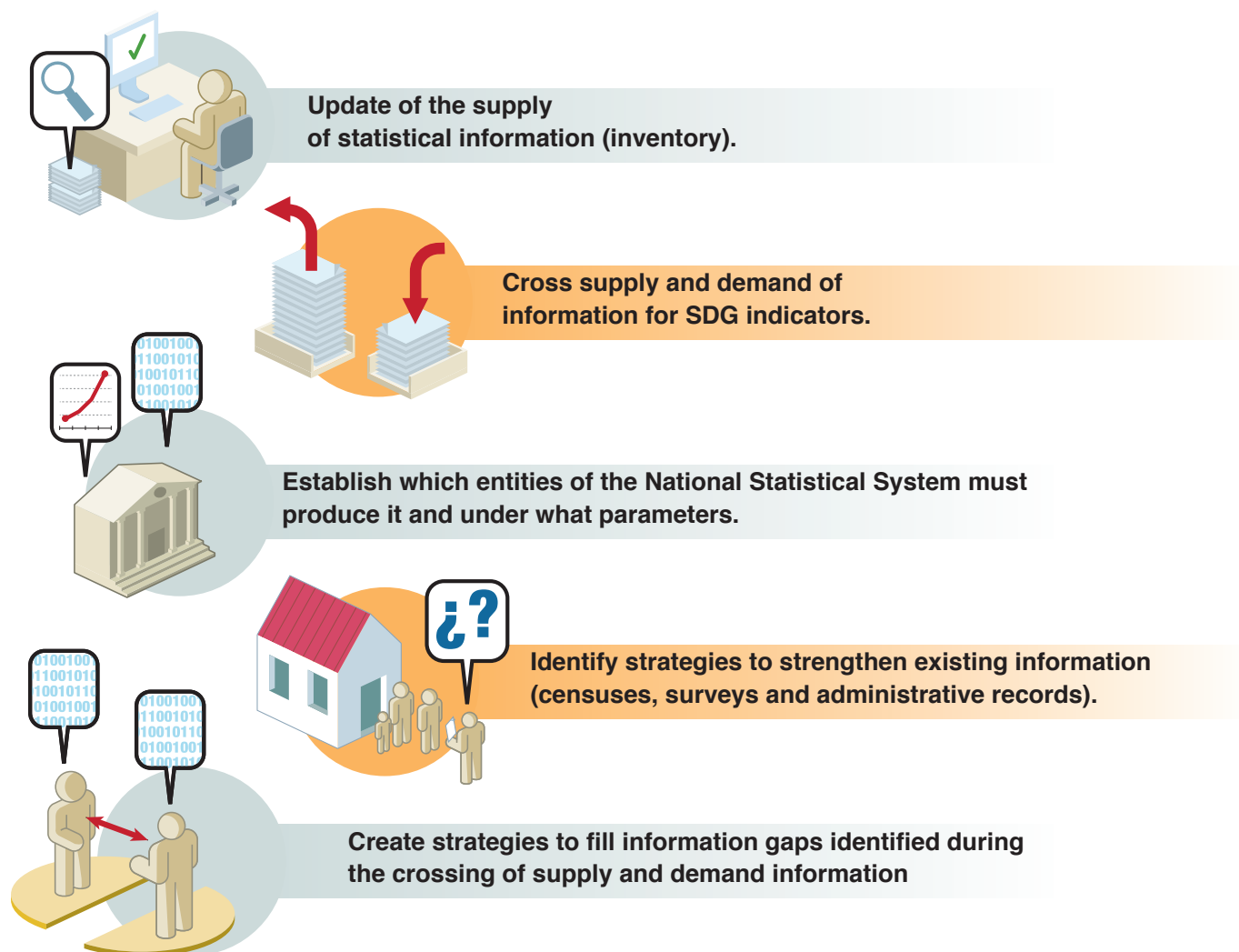
inventory on statistical operations, the quality status of data, and the likelihood of producing new information where there are gaps to measure the Global Goals throughout the territory.

The National Statistics Plan faces several challenges both with the producers and the users of statistics. Currently, the plan requires the approval and subsequent awareness of those actors responsible for the implications, beyond the legislation, funding, positive effects on the improvement of information and the implementation of standards provided for by international organizations.

Some of the main weaknesses PEN has to face are the lack of methodological documentation, the poor implementation of statistical classification to facilitate coherence, the disclosure of statistics (Open Data) for different users, the duplicity in the production of information and its interoperability, among others.

Likewise, the lack of enough information is a relevant issue that will lead to the need of allocating resources for data generation. Thus, entities need to plan their mission and statistic activities to conduct them in a joint fashion in order to fulfill the commitments provided for by the PEN

Graph No. 3: Actions within the framework of the National Statistics Plan to measure the Global Goals in Colombia.



Source: DANE. Design: CEPEICEPEI

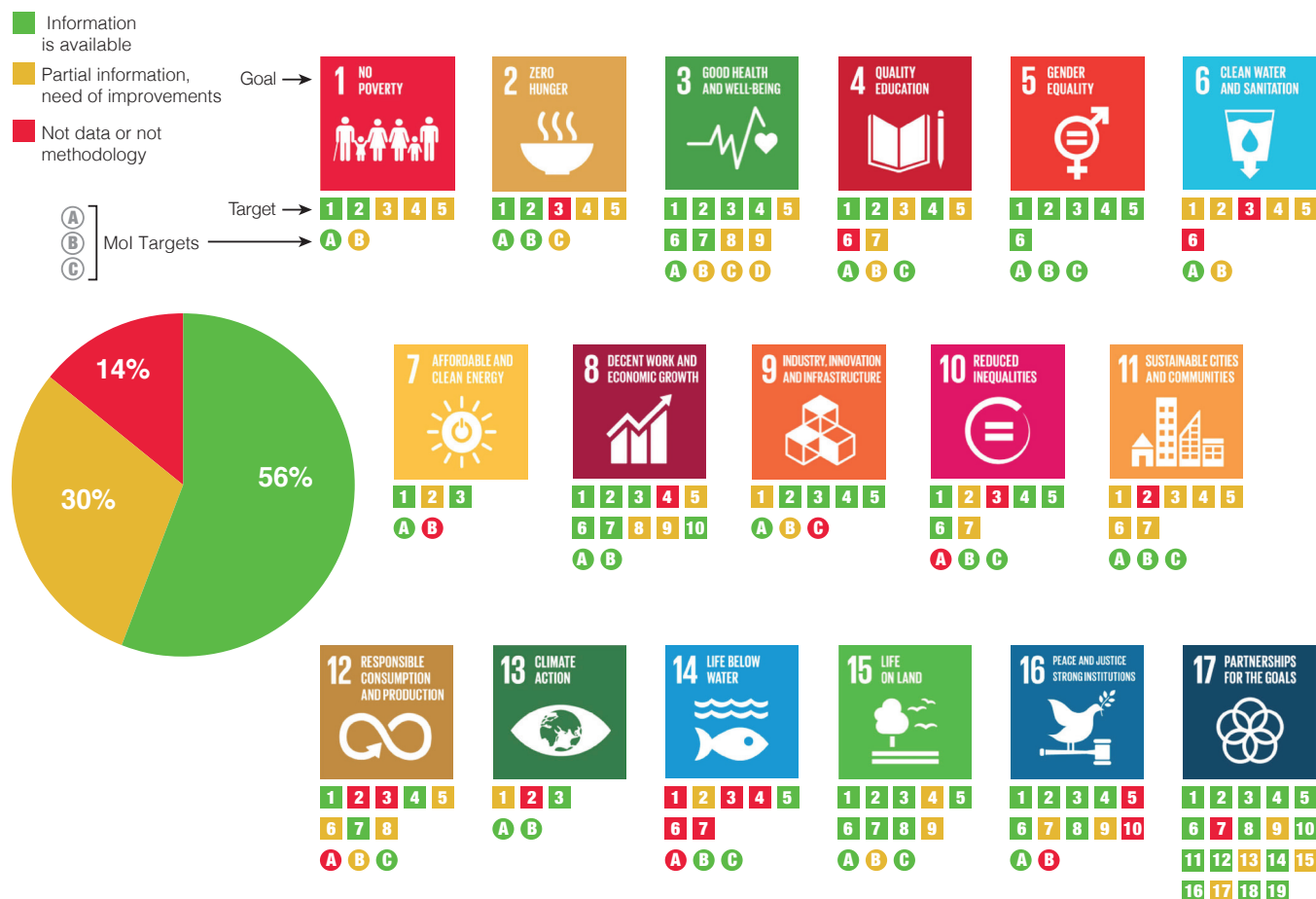
In order to learn about the baseline the country has in terms of information a diagnosis based on the availability of information has been conducted to measure the Sustainable Development Goals and their aims in the country. According to such study, 56% of the goals have information available, while 30% have information which may require improvements or

methodological adjustments; lastly, for 14% of the goals there does not exist any data or a clear methodology to measure the same⁵.

⁵ This information is based on the DANE's presentation: "Data Revolution Roadmaps for Sustainable Development", presented in the workshop organized by the GPSDD called "Participatory Workshop: Toolbox to Develop SDG Data Revolution Roadmaps". This dialogue took place on March 5th, 2016 in New York.



Graph No. 4: Diagnose Chart on the available information to measure the Global Objectives in Colombia



Source: DANE, Design: CEPEI.

The work conducted by the government enables the identification of the challenges that must be tackled beyond the ultimate definition of the indicators, challenges that refer to the ability to make data available for their measurement and the need to coordinate interinstitutional efforts to determine responsibilities for the collection, processing, analysis and disclosure of information.

The preliminary diagnosis and the activities in the Statistics Plan seeks to explore the possible

sources of information which were not studied but may still provide data. In this case, the Commission and DANE are committed to lead the analysis on such 30% of information which does not meet the adequate quality standard, but, which at the same time provides the required inputs to build methodologies which will enable measuring the Global Goals.

The need to measure the indicators through pilot tests is an issue that must be taken into

consideration, aimed at verifying whether the information is enough or not, and the likelihood of preparing data reports to nourish the global indicators.

Thus, a window of opportunities is open due to a temporary coincidence: Colombia will conduct a population census in 2016-2017, which will allow the production of a great amount of information. Even if DANE is responsible for conducting and organizing the census, the working group on indicators within the Commission could play a very important role by designing the questions and modules of the census, thus making it the statistic operation with the greatest coverage in the country.

When applying the census, the global indicators should be considered, to align information requirements and the current national demand. The value of the results of the National Population Census to conduct follow-up and implement the SDGs at the national level grows as it takes into account the limited capacity of the regions and territorial entities to generate and process data under international standards.

Sub-national governments have expressed their uncertainty on how to feed the national measurements from their own levels and they have asked to be considered when contributing with information, but, in general, the current information collection techniques by sampling used by the national government are not aimed at including greater disaggregation, for example, at the level of each municipality (1101 municipalities in the country in the year 2016 (DANE). The above

due to the lack of methodologies to broaden the coverage and the cost of having a greater level of disaggregation.

Some other difficulties in terms of measuring and obtaining data are directly connected to the challenge of an implementation that includes several stakeholders. Given the multidimensional nature of the Goals, the Commission could also give some attention to managing the information and to exchange it both inside and outside the government. The private sector and the academia, for example, were not able to adequately report their progress on the fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG, 2000-2015) even if they had been involved in the process. Thus, there exists the risk of having the same happen to the new Global Goals.

Due to the aforementioned, the Colombian government should accelerate the actions to regulate Article 160 of the “National Statistics System” (SEN), of the Development Plan (COLOMBIA, 2015), which provides for the conformation of SEN. DANE, as the governing body of SEN, must invite to the construction of the National Statistics Plan, to implement standards and best practices, strengthen administrative records and exchange information to generate statistics, by providing the guidelines to share information and to prioritize the SDG reports.

Both at the local and international levels, one of the greatest challenges in terms of data posed by the 2030 Agenda is the need to achieve a high level of disaggregation (by territory, gender, ethnic group, age, dwelling context, income level, etc.).



Regarding the work needed to improve the data provided by the administrative records⁶, through promoting the exploitation of the same information for statistical purposes, (sic) the development of operational and human capacities is required, something which is not easy to achieve when the budget allocated by the State to the statistics sector is low. To this end, it is worth highlighting that the resources allocated to statistical information were kept stable throughout the past three years, which accounted for 0,2% of the national budget.⁷ Last year, the statistics sector underwent important budget cuts to comply with the fiscal and austerity rule in the country.

A factor that must be worked upon is the timeliness and promptness of information since a considerable number of institutions prefer the data provided by the private sector, even if it does not have the same technical rigor as such provided by the national statistical offices, but which is much more updated and allows making timely decisions.

A policy for data compulsory disclosure which the private sector enjoys in exchange of tax incentives, following the system of the United States of America, could provide relevant information. Likewise, Open Data initiatives to make data public contribute to having greater amounts of information available and to generating transparency both for private and public entities. To this end, in a context of financial restrictions,

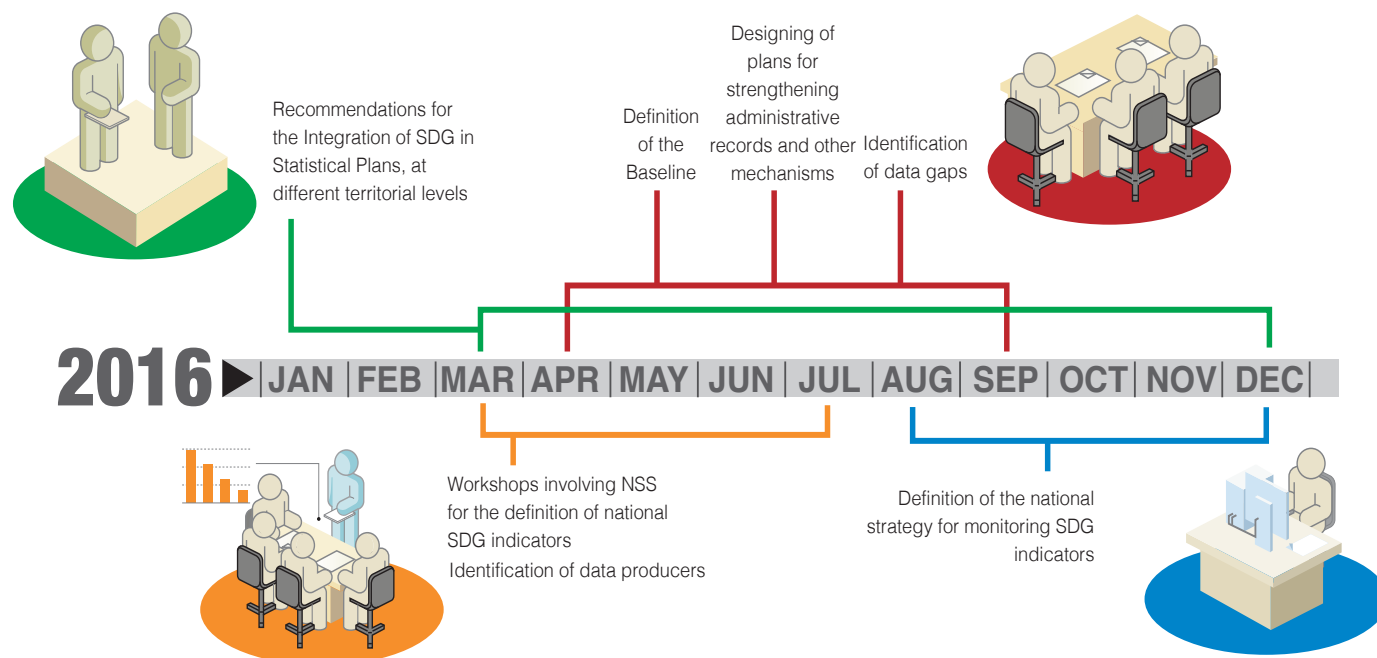
it is important to understand that data is a tool of the greatest economic value that may also be used to plan, and which has the ability to compensate, in the midterm, the income that would be not received when following a policy of such a kind.

These and some other measures could contribute to move beyond simple data mapping towards working with ecosystems which also make visible the relationships among actors, the information circulation channels and the actual data. This is something required by the complexity of following-up and the decision making process to implement the SDGs. Given such circumstances, DANE has established a set of activities that will be conducted during the coming months to measure the Goals at the national level.

⁶ "A mechanism that collects information on an action subject to regulation and control gathered by an office while exercising public functions and which results from fiscal needs or the like, created with the purpose of making the administration of governmental programs visible or to enforce the fulfilment of the legal obligations by the society" (DANE D. Y., 2016).

⁷ Percentage on the General budget of the Nation 2016.

Graph No. 5: Activities for the coming months to measure SDG indicators in Colombia



Source: DANE. Design: CEPEI

For the development of such activities the role of the Commission, or if DANE is going to conduct them as the Coordinator of SEN, is not yet clear nor is the way in which those efforts are going to be put together with the activities the Commission is responsible for. All of these issues shall be determined later on.

As a result, it may be asserted that the country obtained an “early win” regarding global and regional positioning on the discussions about data. Likewise, it has evolved in several aspects to compile information to report on the Sustainable Development Goals; however, there are still various challenges to face during the coming months and years, which must be embraced by every actor and not only by DANE as the governing body of SEN.

Even if Colombia is one of the most active countries both in terms of improving its statistical processes and in international scenarios regarding data for sustainable development, it still faces important challenges in terms of formulating national indicators, grounding the implementation of SDGs in results management, accountability and follow-up of development actions.

The importance of calling other actors for them to engage to the diagnose and analysis to support the construction of new information and improving the existing one, and to generate trust in the actions conducted by the government become the primary challenges. To this end, the private sector and the civil society should be invited to be allies in providing and managing the collection of information to report on the indicators established for the Global Goals.

Lastly, continuing to collaborate and interact with international organisms to strengthen those areas where there is lack information or where there is not enough technical knowledge, could have an impact in obtaining better data for the country.

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