

CONCEPT NOTE

**DEFINING AND COORDINATING
THE INFORMATION GAP THROUGH AN
INTEGRATED INDICATOR FRAMEWORK**

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The National Statistical System (NSS) is a collection of independent data and statistics producers coordinated by the Statistician-General (SG) to ensure that the system of statistical production continues to supply data and information to satisfy the demand of data users. In particular, the demand for statistical information is to track the efficacy and progress made by entities of the NSS on key government policies and programmes. In this regard, the government has described the development outcomes it hopes to achieve as part of a comprehensive process to transform society, the economy, and state of the environment. We envisage that such a transformation will lead to an improvement in the life-circumstances of all its citizens to create the “South Africa we want.” The National Development Plan (NDP) of South Africa provides targets to serve as markers in the transformation process and to realise the development outcomes by 2030.

Although the NDP provides the blueprint through which South Africa hopes to achieve its development objectives it is not the only framework the country is committed to implement. Over the past decade, Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) coordinated the reporting process on:

- the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and
- participated in the development of the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 development indicators.

The experience gained and its intimate knowledge on the various development frameworks makes Stats SA uniquely qualified to identify the linkages and overlaps across frameworks. In an effort to minimise the burden of reporting on the plethora of development frameworks and for Stats SA to quantify the demand for statistical information of national importance; Stats SA embarked on a process to compile a comprehensive set of development indicators. Given the realities of South Africa’s limited:

- data production resources;
- paucity of statistical skills; and
- concerns about statistical quality

necessitated a review of the various frameworks and how the demand for such information from the NSS results in duplication in reporting and introduces inefficiencies that the NSS is unable to sustain.

2. THE NEED FOR COORDINATING INSTRUMENTS TO ADDRESS GAPS IN THE NSS

The Stats Act requires the SG to lead the NSS by coordinating statistical activities as they relate to the supply and demand for statistics. In this context, coordinating the NSS implies that the SG direct

activities of the NSS that respond to the supply and demand for information. In particular, the coordinating role of the SG requires the SG to respond to the deficiencies that characterise the current state of the NSS; viz.: (1) Information Gap¹, (2) Quality Gap², and the (3) Capacity Gap³. The coordinating function of the SG is to mitigate and ameliorate the effects of the *i*GAP, *c*GAP, and *q*GAP. What follows is a brief description of how to coordinate the information gap (*i*GAP)

2.1. COORDINATING INSTRUMENTS TO ADDRESS THE *i*GAP

Traditionally, the *i*GAP of the NSS was undefined. Informally, *i*GAP was understood as the inability of the NSS to satisfy South Africa’s data needs with respect to key statistical indicators. Oftentimes the lack of data on key indicators was ascribed to weaknesses arising from the *c*GAP. In turn, it was understood that the *c*GAP was the insufficient human, technical, and budgetary resources by entities of the NSS to produce the statistics South Africa requires. Hence the *c*GAP manifests itself as the *i*GAP. While true to some extent, this is not the full story. The more complete picture is that historically South Africa never produced statistics within a paradigm of supply and demand premised on an overarching socio-economic & environment policy framework. The advent of development frameworks such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the country’s own National Development Plan (NDP) produced an outline of statistical demand to which the SG, Stats SA and NSS entities must respond.

In view of the foregoing, we now believe and understand the *i*GAP as the outcome and manifestation of the tensions between statistical demand and supply and not only a consequence of a lack of skills or resources. In turn, such supply and demand tensions exposed *systemic weaknesses* within the NSS and its entities such as capacity – both technical and budgetary. The introduction of the NDP, international (i.e. SDGs) and continental Development Frameworks (i.e. AU Agenda 2063), and the District Development Model now provides the necessary basis for statistical production and supply. Given the new conceptual understanding in which statistical production occurs, a more complete understanding of *i*GAP emerges.

Therefore, the proposed definition for the *i*GAP is:

$$\text{NSS } i\text{Gap} = \sum \text{Data}_{\text{DEMAND (required)}} - \sum \text{Data}_{\text{SUPPLY (produced)}}$$

Figure 1: Definition of the "Information Gap"

¹ *i*GAP – is defined as the lack of information, data, and statistics on the development challenges to be addressed

² *q*GAP – is defined as the lack of quality in the data and statistics that is produced

³ *c*GAP – is defined as the lack of skills by producing agencies to provide data and statistics that meet the criteria of official statistics

Stats SA now understands the μ GAP as the interaction of the supply and demand for statistics within an overarching policy framework. Therefore, the ϵ GAP, η GAP, and μ GAP are simply manifestations of the *systemic weaknesses* that exist within and amongst the NSS and its entities as they try to respond to an ever-changing policy environment.

In view of the proposed definition above, quantifying the demand and supply for statistics is imperative to quantify the extent of the μ GAP. This is illustrated in figure 2 of a hypothetical Department “Y”. Within Department Y several collections are undertaken as either administrative or survey-based collections. These collections are informed by historical collections and the mandate of Department “Y.” for either operational and/or strategic purposes. Whilst departments can report on many output indicators, many entities of the NSS are unable to report on several outcome indicators the department is required to report on. The main reason – a lack of data! This lack of data for reporting on government outcomes contributes is responsible for the data/information gap. This is illustrated below.

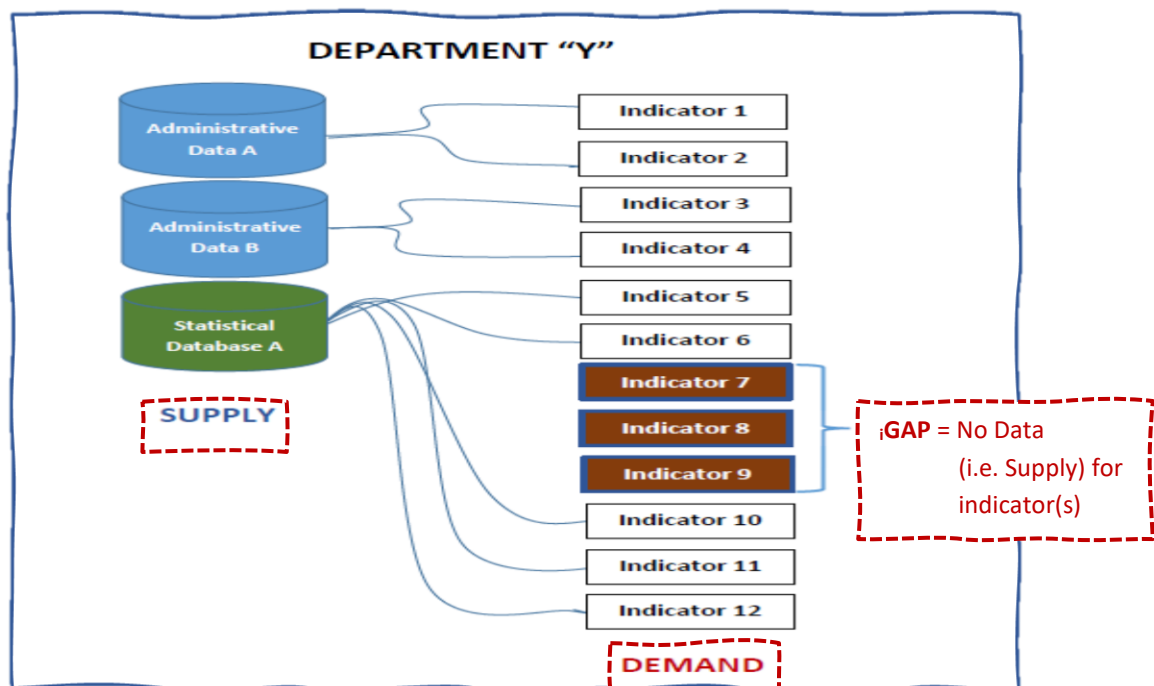


Figure 2: The Information or Data Gap in an entity of the NSS such as a National or Provincial Department

Therefore, this concept note proposes a new paradigm for statistical coordination to mitigate the impact of μ GAP. Mitigating the μ GAP must address the supply and demand issues for data. Failure to adopt such a coordinating paradigm will exacerbate and amplify the systemic weaknesses of the NSS.

2.2. QUANTIFYING THE DEMAND

2.2.1. DEMAND

The absence of a well-described set of statistical user needs and associated indicators necessitated identifying proxies to estimate the demand for statistical information. A key assumption is that for statistics of national importance⁴, an examination of the government's outcomes and policy frameworks may reasonably approximate the demand. The acceptance of the National Development Plan (NDP) and international development frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provides a convenient point of departure for quantifying the statistical demand. There are many desirable outcomes of integrating the suite of SDG, NDP and the Africa Union's Agenda 2063 (AU2063) indicators into an Integrated Indicator Framework (IIF) through a common organising framework. The process in creating an IIF entailed adopting a single organising framework for the IIF⁵. The IIF adopted the 17 goals of the SDGs as the organising framework. As can be seen in figure 3 the process entailed reviewing indicators from the NDP, SADC (RISDP), and AU2063 and incorporating them into the SDG organising framework. Finally, the alignment of indicators from the various development frameworks ensured that duplicate indicators are identified and eliminated.

3. CONCLUSION

Coordinating the iGAP in the NSS is complex. It requires an approach that introduces a data coordination function by SG. The mandate for implementing such a coordination function is derived from the Stats Act (No. 6 of 1999) and is within the scope of his duties. The data coordination function requires the development of tools to facilitate such coordination. In that regard, the Integrated Indicator Framework and the establishment of Inventories of Data Sources become tools that give effect to the coordination function of the SG as mandated by the Stats Act.

⁴ Defined as statistics on key national and international development outcomes and policy decisions adopted by government.

⁵ The organising framework of the IIF is the 17 Goals of the SDGs