Method for Data Evaluation

Introduction

In partnership with Esri and the National Geographic Society, *SDGs Today: The Global Hub for Real-Time SDG Data* is a platform developed by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN). This one-of-a-kind open access data platform has the potential to revolutionize how we understand and communicate the urgency of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and how we develop solutions. SDGs Today provides a much-needed virtual space where key stakeholders from around the world can access and engage with real-time and timely data on the SDGs and learn how to use the data effectively to push Agenda 2030 forward.

The platform aims to provide a complementary source of real-time and timely datasets derived from innovative methods to assist SDG monitoring. This document provides an overview of the data selection criteria, the scope of content and the evaluation process carried out for the data featured on SDGs Today. By documenting the process, we aim to advance our methodological contribution and maximize the use of timely and spatially disaggregated data to address data gaps for the SDGs.

Why Timely Data?

To understand and effectively track progress on the SDGs, we need reliable, quality, and timely data. SDG relevant data, if even available, is often out of date, as most countries rely on official data that is not updated regularly. Geo-referenced data has an important role to play in supplementing traditional data sources and filling in the data gaps, but there is a critical need for more timely geo-referenced data to help track progress on the SDGs. Timely data is defined as data that is updated annually or more frequently.

User Audience

The data hub is designed for individuals interested in using timely data to push the 2030 Agenda forward. This includes policymakers, government officials, national statistics offices, journalists, academics, students, members of civil society, and others.
Data Evaluation Framework

SDGs Today is focused on collecting data through a comprehensive and systematic evaluation process. This section outlines the data selection criteria and evaluation process defined for SDGs Today.

Data Selection Criteria

The following eight criteria are used to identify, collect, review and evaluate data for SDGs Today:

• **Level of frequency**: the team collects datasets that are updated at a higher frequency than many official data sources which do not offer regular updates. SDGs Today features data that are updated in near real-time, or on a daily, monthly, weekly, or at least annual basis. All datasets must be produced within the last year and/or updated regularly.

• **Spatial coverage and disaggregation**: while SDGs Today presents aggregated headline numbers on the homepage, the datasets must be geo-referenced to help us understand where people need access to essential services, where the SDG gaps are, and how to collectively address geographic challenges. To the extent possible SDGs Today features global datasets, however we welcome submissions from data providers with data at different levels of disaggregation (e.g. regional, national, subnational, etc.)

• **Validated methodology**: we look for datasets derived from clearly defined and robust methodologies that have been peer-reviewed or validated. SDGs Today requires all data providers to share technical documentation of their methods. The data hub features a variety of data types derived from different methods including, modeled, survey, remote sensed and other types of data.

• **Reliability of sources**: all relevant and robust data sources will be considered for SDGs Today. Our team aims to explore and collect data from new sources, such as satellite imagery, mobile phones, and other new technologies. We also value data derived from combining new and traditional data sources, as different sources of data can complement one another and present a more cohesive understanding of the issue at hand. Above all, we ensure that the data is from an accurate and complete source.

• **Public accessibility**: the data evaluated for SDGs Today must be licensed for re-use and open data. The accessibility and transparency of the data and metadata allows SDGs Today users to hold data providers accountable to methodological integrity and supports public engagement with the SDGs. The data hub provides links to original datasets or data provider websites where users can directly connect with the data providers.
• **Thematically relevant:** all datasets are thematically relevant to one or more of the 17 SDGs. The data featured on SDGs Today are not the official datasets for SDG monitoring and therefore do not need to correspond to a specific SDG target or indicator. However, datasets that assist with monitoring of one or more official SDG target and/or indicator are preferable. The data hub features topics relevant to sustainable development which can fill data gaps to support and improve the implementation of the SDGs.

• **Ease of understanding:** the message, methodology, and visual presentation of the datasets evaluated by the team must be clear and communicable to all users. Every dataset featured on SDGs Today is featured along with the description of the dataset, a map, and additional relevant resources.

• **Sustainability of production:** the data hub’s long-term strategy intends to feature datasets that will be available and updated during the implementation of the SDGs until 2030. However, we evaluate the sustainability of production on a case to case basis, particularly in the event of societal, economic, and environmental disruptions or extreme events, such as COVID-19, in order to provide users with the most up-to-date information.

**Evaluation and Review Procedure**

All datasets featured on SDGs Today are rigorously vetted by SDSN. The datasets are assessed and prepared in four steps:

**Step 1: Collection**

Using the above Data Selection Criteria, the team identifies and reviews datasets that will help narrow the data gap for the SDGs. There are many different methods of collecting data:

- Identifying existing and readily available datasets from reports, academic research, etc.;
- Working with data providers with validated methodologies to identify potential opportunities to expand the research and/or dataset in order to meet SDGs Today criteria; and
- Collecting and overlaying spatial datasets to create a valuable output related to the SDGs.

**Step 2: Analysis and evaluation**

After a thorough examination of a dataset by the SDGs Today team, we document all the details related to the criteria and the dataset—including strengths and limitations. The analysis is then shared with SDSN and affiliated expert advisors for a second round of review. The review

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1 We prefer working with automated solutions and encourage data partners to provide us with an API or work with our team to develop an automated solution for updating the datasets.
process is coordinated by SDSN’s Thematic Research Network on Data and Statistics (TReNDS).

**Step 3: Address gaps**

Once experts and advisors sign off on all the criteria for each dataset, the team works on filling the gaps for datasets that are not readily available. In some instances, the team works with the data provider to expand geographic coverage, making the message more communicable, ensure completeness of the data, etc.

**Step 4: Preparation**

Once all components are ready, the team prepares:

- a brief description about the dataset, methodology, and other relevant details;
- a map to visualize the data,\(^2\) using ArcGIS
- metadata, to ensure all details are transparent
- Links to complementary resources, including relevant StoryMaps, Learn Lessons, and SDG Academy MOOCs.

The team regularly reviews and assesses the criteria for each dataset in order to ensure the robustness, timeliness, and accessibility of all data featured on the platform. We aim to evaluate the impact of the data available through SDGs Today and monitor the outcome and results.

**Data Submission**

If you have a real-time or timely dataset that meets the above criteria, please fill out this form. Thank you for your interest in adding your dataset to SDGs Today.

For more information visit, sdgstoday.org or contact sdgstoday@undsn.org.

\(^2\) We encourage GIS capable data providers to provide data in a spatial format to support higher degree of data accuracy.