Policy Brief

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS) DATA IN KENYA: ADDRESSING GAPS, TRACKING, MONITORING AND UTILIZATION OF SDG INDICATORS

CHOICE KENYA PROJECT

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Policy Brief

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Data in Kenya: Addressing Gaps, Tracking, Monitoring and Utilization of SDG Indicators

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Key Messages

01

Strengthen the National Minimum-Optimal SDG Dataset by building on Kenya's existing SDG Indicator Framework, exploring additional data sources for reporting, and promoting its use to all counties

02

Strengthen SDG data systems by investing in modern data infrastructure, supporting community-based and administrative data systems, and ensuring consistent financing for sub-national and national surveys and census.

03

Promote inclusive data collection, data use and collaboration through cross-sector partnerships, use of citizen-generated data, and targeted capacity building for inclusive systems. This can enhance data collection, utilization and policy relevance, particularly for under-reported goals.

Introduction

The CHOICE (Consortium to Address Climate Change, Inequality, and Other Complex Challenges Influencing Human Health) Project in Kenya is led by Aga Khan University. It aims to advance the achievement of SDGs through research and Think Tank engagements. Through its Think Tank, CHOICE facilitates dialogues, research, and policy influence by convening academia, government actors, civil society, and youth around issues of health, gender, climate action and SDGs data for development.

As Kenya advances its commitments under the 2030 Agenda, robust and timely data remains foundational to tracking progress and informing decision making and effective policy responses. Yet, significant data gaps and data underutilization continue to hinder national and sub-national SDG monitoring efforts. Kenya currently reports on about 68% of global SDG indicators, with significant gaps under SDG 3 (Health and Well-being), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

Despite the existence of rich datasets in some sectors, data is often siloed, underfunded, poorly disaggregated, and not translated into action. Furthermore, key data collection initiatives such as the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS) and Kenya Population and Housing Census face sustainability challenges due to reduced funding. In addition, citized-generated and administrative data are underutilized due to lack of harmonized platforms, poorly designed data collection tools and unclear methodologies.

The CHOICE Think Tank, through workshops and expert dialogues, identified an urgent need to strengthen Kenya's SDG data ecosystem through improved data generation, integration of inclusive practices, quality control, and long-term financing. This policy brief highlights critical challenges, emerging opportunities, and policy recommendations for strengthening Kenya's SDG data ecosystem, ensuring inclusivity, sustainability, and actionable insights to inform decision making, national planning and accountability.

The State of SDGs Data in Kenya

Kenya tracks 171 out of 251 SDG indicators[1] (68% of the global total Indicators), (Figure 1). However, several indicators remain unreported due to various reasons including; either data is completely missing, is available but inaccessible, sometimes available but not in the required form, or is outdated or not up to date, not sufficiently disaggregated, or collected but not compiled. These data gaps combined with systemic, capacity-related issues, and institutional challenges greatly affect SDGs monitoring, tracking, reporting and ultimately planning and effective policy development and implementation.

One of the underlying issues is the existence of silos across data-producing institutions. Many government ministries, departments, and agencies, alongside non-state actors, scholars and academicians collect relevant SDG-related data. However, lack of proper coordination, interoperability, and standardized protocols often prevent this data from being consolidated into the National Statistical System (NSS) for official reporting (Republic of Kenya, 2020). In addition, the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), as the custodian of official statistics, maintains high quality and methodological standards before accepting data for reporting. While this ensures statistical rigor, it often leads to exclusion of potentially useful administrative and sectoral data that does not meet these standards, further widening the reporting gaps. Moreover, challenges around frequency of data collection mean that available data may not be timely enough to inform decision-making cycles.

Summary of the National SDG Indicators

Goal	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4	Goal 5	Goal 6	Goal 7	Goal 8	Goal 9	Goal 10	Goal 11	Goal 12	Goal 13	Goal 14	Goal 15	Goal 16	Goal 17
Global Indicators 251	13	15	28	12	14	11	6	17	12	14	16	13	8	10	14	24	24
National Indicators 171	10	9	17	9	10	11	6	11	10	12	9	6	6	5	8	17	15
Per cent 68.1%	76.9	60.0	60.7	75.0	71.4	100.0	100.0	64.7	83.3	85.7	56.3	46.2	75.0	50.0	57.1	70.8	62.5
Indicators in the National Indicator Framework (NIF)	1.1.1	2.1.1	3.1.1	4.1.1	5.2.1	6.1.1	7.1.1	8.1.1	9.1.1	10.1.1	11.1.1	12.1.1	13.1.1	14.1.1	15.1.1	16.1.1	17.1.1
	1.2.1	2.1.2	3.1.2	4.1.2	5.2.2	6.2.1	7.1.2	8.2.1	9.1.2	10.2.1	11.2.1	12.3.1	13.1.2	14.3.1	15.1.2	16.1.3	17.1.2
	1.2.2	2.2.1	3.2.1	4.2.1	5.3.1	6.3.1	7.2.1	8.3.1	9.2.1	10.4.1	11.3.1	12.4.1	13.1.3	14.4.1	15.3.1	16.1.4	17.3.2
	1.3.1	2.2.2	3.2.2	4.2.2	5.3.2	6.3.2	7.3.1	8.5.2	9.2.2	10.4.2	11.4.1	12.4.2	13.2.1	14.5.1	15.4.1	16.2.2	17.4.1
	1.4.1	2.2.4	3.3.1	4.3.1	5.4.1	6.4.1	7.a.1	8.6.1	9.3.2	10.5.1	11.5.1	12.7.1	13.2.2	14.7.1	15.7.1	16.2.3	17.5.1
	1.4.2	2.5.1	3.3.2	4.5.1	5.5.1	6.4.2	7.b.1	8.7.1	9.5.1	10.6.1	11.6.1	12.a.1	13.a.1		15.9.1	16.3.2	17.6.1
	1.5.1	2.a.1	3.3.3	4.6.1	5.5.2	6.5.1		8.8.2	9.5.2	10.7.2	11.7.1				15.a.1	16.3.3	17.8.1
	1.5.3	2.a.2	3.3.4	4.a.1	5.6.1	6.5.2		8.9.1	9.a.1	10.7.3	11.b.1				15.c.1	16.4.2	17.11.1
	1.5.4	2.c.1	3.4.2	4.c.1	5.a.1	6.6.1		8.10.1	9.b.1	10.7.4	11.b.2					16.5.1	17.12.1
	1.a.2		3.6.1		5.b.1	6.a.1		8.10.2	9.c.1	10.a.1						16.6.1	17.13.1
			3.7.1			6.b.1		8.a.1		10.b.1						16.6.2	17.15.1
			3.7.2							10.c.1						16.7.1	17.17.1
			3.8.2													16.8.1	17.18.2
			3.a.1													16.9.1	17.18.3
			3.b.1													16.10.1	17.19.2
			3.b.2													16.10.2	
			3.c.1													16.a.1	

Figure 1: Summary of SDG Indicators in the National SDGs Indicator Framework (NIF) in Kenya (Adopted from KNBS NIF)[2]

With regards to SDGs 3, 5 and 13, which CHOICE project focuses on:

SDG 3 (Health and well-being): 11 indicators out of global 28 indicator for SDG 3 are unreported. For instance, alcohol consumption data (3.5.2) exists at local levels (e.g., from manufacturers, pubs), but lacks standard methodologies for national reporting.

SDG 5 (Gender Equality): 4 out of 14 indicators are unreported. Legal and institutional coordination gaps affect indicators like 5.6.2 and 5.a.2 on women's rights i.e. land rights and legal frameworks.

SDG 13 (Climate Action): Only 2 out of 8 indicators are not reported. Methodological and technical gaps persist for indicators such as 13.3.1, which requires climate education data that could be sourced from institutions. Indicator 13.b.1 which targets least developed countries and small island developing states is not applicable for Kenya .

Worth noting, according to KNBS, administrative data remains the main source of data for SDGs indicators in Kenya contributing to 67% of the data, followed by census and survey data (32%) and recently adopted citizen generated data (1%). These data sources underscore the importance of strengthening collaboration and technical capacity within the National Statistical Systems (NSS) to make data timely, more usable and inclusive.

Key Challenges

Limited infrastructure and capacity deficits:
Inadequate digital and physical infrastructure, especially at sub-national levels, limits systematic data collection, storage, analysis, and sharing. County-level administrative data is often not transformed into usable statistics due to lack of capacity and harmonized systems.

Fragmentation and underutilization of existing data:
A large amount of potentially useful data is collected by Ministries, Departments, Agencies and Counties (MDACs), CSOs, and academic institutions, but remains underutilized due to poor integration and coordination of official statistics. It is siloed across institutions (KNBS,

KEMRI, County Governments, CSO's, Private Sector, Academia and scholars etc) and often underutilized.

Inconsistent funding: National census and surveys are constrained by donor dependency and irregular budgetary allocations.

**Disaggregated data and frequency of data collection:** In other cases, data collected by different actors is not disaggregated by sex, geographical, or age, and data is not collected frequently enough to support timely decision-making.

Opportunities and Innovations

Alternative data sources: Innovative data sources, such as community health data and citizen-generated data, offer untapped potential to fill data gaps and enhance inclusivity. Leveraging models like Kilifi's community health surveillance system (Ngugi et al., 2021) could bridge data gaps while promoting local ownership and participation.
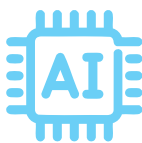
Artificial intelligence and predictive analytics: Technology can help forecast trends and complement existing data sources, as practiced in countries moving away from traditional censuses. Thus, leveraging AI and predictive technologies, as practiced in some Scandinavian countries, could complement administrative data and reduce reliance on expensive surveys

National collaboration platforms: Strengthening partnerships between KNBS, Ministries, Departments and Agencies of the government (MDA's), CSOs, county governments, and academia can create synergies, collaborations and regular data collection from both state and non-state actors as well as reduce duplication. The collaborations should focus on developing shared data repositories, setting common data standards, and aligning research priorities to national policy needs. They also need to establish regular dialogue forums to exchange findings, validate data, and agree on how

evidence will be translated into policy. In this way, initiatives that bring together academic institutions, civil society, private sector, and government agencies can reduce duplication, promote transparency, and accelerate the adoption of best practices. Therefore, initiatives that bring together academic institutions, civil societies, private sector, and government agencies can foster shared data platforms, exchange and adoption of best practices.

Simplified standardized local data tools: Locally adapted user-friendly tools and open-access platforms can enable faster, lower-cost data generation and analysis at the grassroots level. That is, collaboration platforms should support the development and rollout of locally adapted, user-friendly and simplified tools, such as harmonized survey templates, digital data collection apps adoptable to various contexts, and shared open-access dashboards. These tools can make it easier for county governments, CSOs, and community-level actors to collect and analyze data consistently, reduce costs, and feed reliable information into national systems.
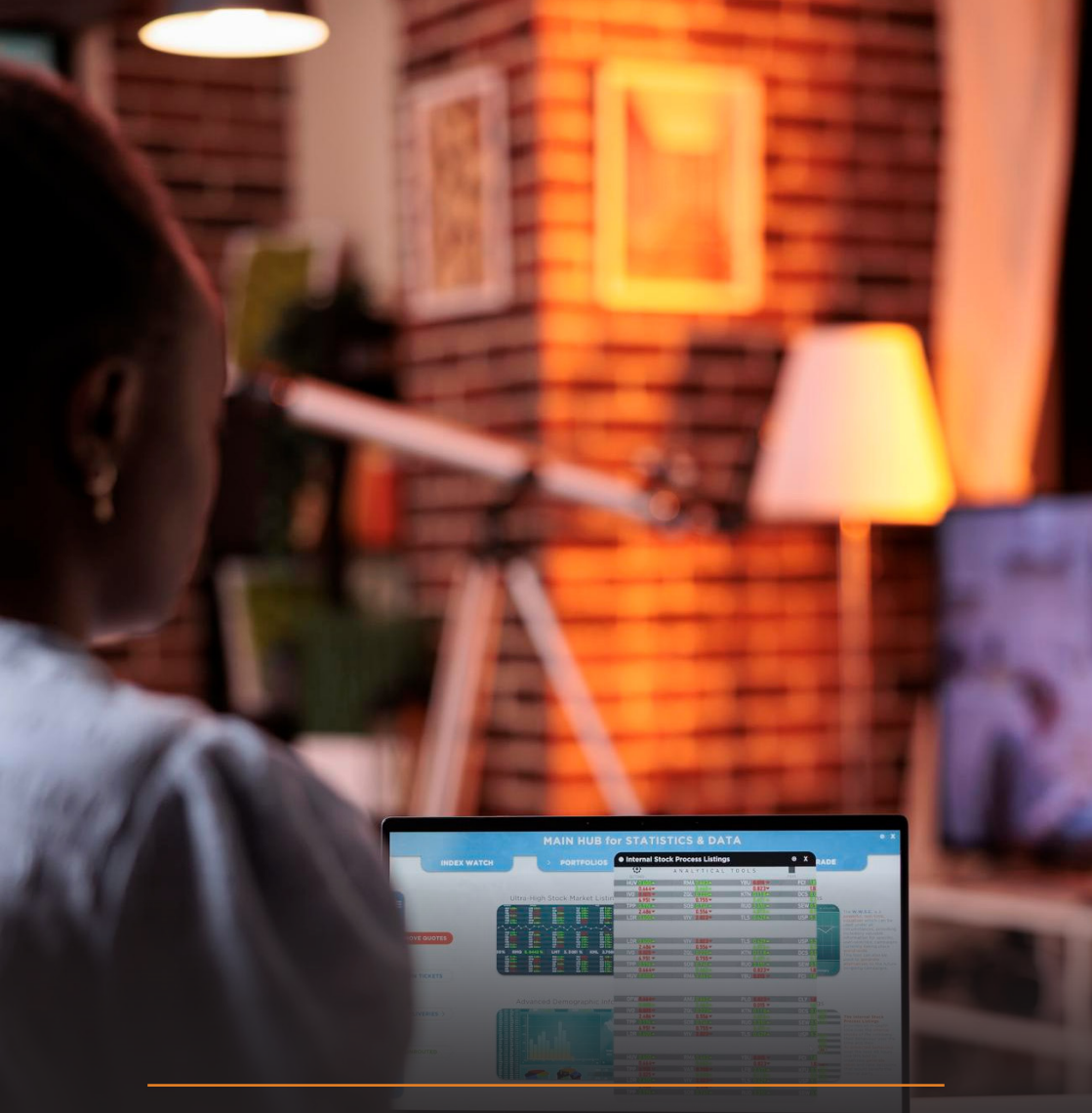
Recommendations and Conclusion

Policy Recommendations

1. **Strengthen and streamline national minimum optimal dataset and standard monitoring tool for different sectors reporting on different SDGs.** This should include reviewing and updating the package of core quantitative and qualitative indicators that complements the Kenya SDG Indicator Framework. This is while prioritizing the identification and integration of additional data sources, supporting the review process of the framework to incorporate emerging indicators. In particular, review the "basic minimum package" of disaggregated data required for standardized, consistent, and sustainable SDG reporting at both national and county levels, anchored at KNBS, and partner with NACOSTI. Additionally, legally mandate and enhance the integration of all research, programmatic, and administrative data generated in Kenya—including from civil society and other SDG-implementing stakeholders—into a centralized national data platform. Finally, promote consistent application of the dataset across counties. This will enhance data accessibility, coordination, and evidence-based decision-making for sustainable development.

2. **Invest in sustainable and scalable data systems:** Modernize data infrastructure, including revival and tapping of existing data systems like the National Data Center at Konza while also strengthening county-level data hubs to improve grassroots reporting.

3. **Localize and scale up community-based data collection:** For instance, train community health workers and local administrators in simplified data collection and analytical tools. Additionally, expanding successful models like Kilifi's community health data surveillance system to other counties could be considered for mainstreaming community-

based data collection.

4. **Promote Interagency data sharing and governance:** Strengthen legal frameworks and MOUs for data sharing between KNBS, ministries, counties, academia and partners. Further, incentivize academic institutions and NGOs to contribute to the national SDGs data ecosystem

5. **Enhance capacity and data utilization for decision making:** Training for data collectors and users (especially at county and local levels) can significantly improve data quality, relevance, and uptake. Complex data should be translated into actionable insights for planners and policymakers.

6. **Explore Innovative Financing and secure sustainable financing for data ecosystems:** Revitalizing key national surveys and strengthening SDG data systems requires consistent domestic funding, anchored in both national and county budgets, to ensure government ownership and reduce overreliance on donor support. At the same time, innovative financing mechanisms—such as philanthropic funding, blended finance for gender, mental health, and climate data, and green bonds for climate actions—should be explored to complement domestic allocations. Combining stable domestic financing with innovative approaches can diversify funding sources, enhance resilience, and create a more sustainable and inclusive data ecosystem.

Conclusion

Kenya's path to achieving the SDGs hinges not only on the availability of data, but on its quality, accessibility, sustainability, and relevance to decision-makers. The CHOICE Think Tank urges government, development partners, academia, civil society and private sector to co-invest in a robust, inclusive, and adaptive data ecosystem. With the right policies, Kenya can shift from data scarcity to data-powered progress that leaves no one behind and ensures sustainable development.

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Note: The Think Tank team comprises experts and academia with SDGs and Data, climate change, gender, and mental health, backgrounds. The brief is aimed at supporting advocacy efforts and policy development for robust climate actions and advancing SDGs related commitments, in Kenya.

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