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OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING INDICATORS FOR THE HIV RESPONSE

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CONTENTS

BACKGROUND

Indicators standards for the HIV response

These operational guidelines provide detailed information about how to use the indicator assessment tool. This tool assesses the extent to which indicators intended for use in the HIV response meet a set of internationally agreed standards. These operational guidelines, the indicator assessment tool and the standards have all been produced by the UNAIDS Monitoring and Evaluation Reference Group (MERG).

In recent years, there has been a renewed emphasis on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of HIV epidemics and responses. This has contributed to an increased number of indicators, many of which are not harmonized with each other. This can make it difficult to accurately track the epidemic and the response at both the global and national level. The number of indicators has also resulted in an increased reporting burden in countries at different administrative levels.

To address this situation, MERG commissioned the development of indicator standards, which were produced in 2010. The goal of these standards was to help harmonize, improve the quality and reduce the quantity of indicators used to monitor HIV responses. An additional aim was to reduce the burden of global reporting on countries by harmonizing global-level indicators across multilateral and bilateral organizations.

The standards have contributed to the development and use of indicators that provide decision-makers and key stakeholders at national and subnational levels with useful, feasible and relevant information – indicators that help them manage and implement their country's response to the epidemic effectively. Indicator selection is not an end in itself. Rather, indicators should clearly demonstrate if desired results have been achieved.

THE INDICATOR STANDARDS

An individual indicator should meet the following five standards:

1. The indicator is needed and useful.
2. The indicator has technical merit.
3. The indicator is fully defined.
4. It is feasible to collect and analyse data for this indicator.
5. The indicator has been field-tested or used in practice.

In addition, where indicators are presented as part of a set, this set should meet a sixth standard—namely, that the overall set is coherent and balanced.

Where are these standards applicable?

These standards are applicable in four contexts:

- ***Globally.*** The standards are relevant for indicators that are included or being considered for inclusion in internationally agreed indicator sets for tracking the progress of national responses to HIV. This includes the core indicators recommended by UNAIDS to monitor the 2011 United National Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS.
- ***Nationally.*** The standards are relevant at the national level for people who need to select, revise and use indicators to monitor and manage their own HIV response. For the purpose of this document, the national setting includes subnational and local settings.
- ***Thematic areas.*** Technical experts who are developing indicators for use in monitoring activities conducted in general and specific focus areas, should use the standards during the indicator development process. Examples of thematic areas include counselling and testing, prevention of mother-to-child transmission, and male circumcision.
- ***Large-scale and/or donor-funded programmes.*** Managers and M&E specialists, who are developing or reviewing indicators to monitor large-scale and/or donor-funded programmes, should also use the standards when developing, recommending and/or requiring indicators. Examples of these types of programmes include the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Global Fund), and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief.

Who should use these guidelines?

These guidelines are focused at the national level and are meant for anyone who needs to develop new indicators, or select or review existing indicators for assessing responses to HIV.

In addition, the guidelines may be useful for other people involved in the settings outlined above, including multilateral and bilateral agencies, national M&E specialists, and programme or project managers. In particular, work conducted by indicator review panels[1] at the global level, which is part of the MERG's area of responsibility, will be a resource for such people, allowing them to select or prioritize indicators based on an assessment process that has already been done. Using pre-assessed indicators could contribute considerably to reducing reporting burden and promoting harmonization.

When can the indicator standards and indicator assessment tool be used?

These standards and the associated indicator assessment tool will be useful at different stages in the settings described in "Who should use these guidelines?" For example, when:

- developing new indicators;
- selecting from existing indicators;
- seeking to revise and improve indicators; and
- reviewing indicators.

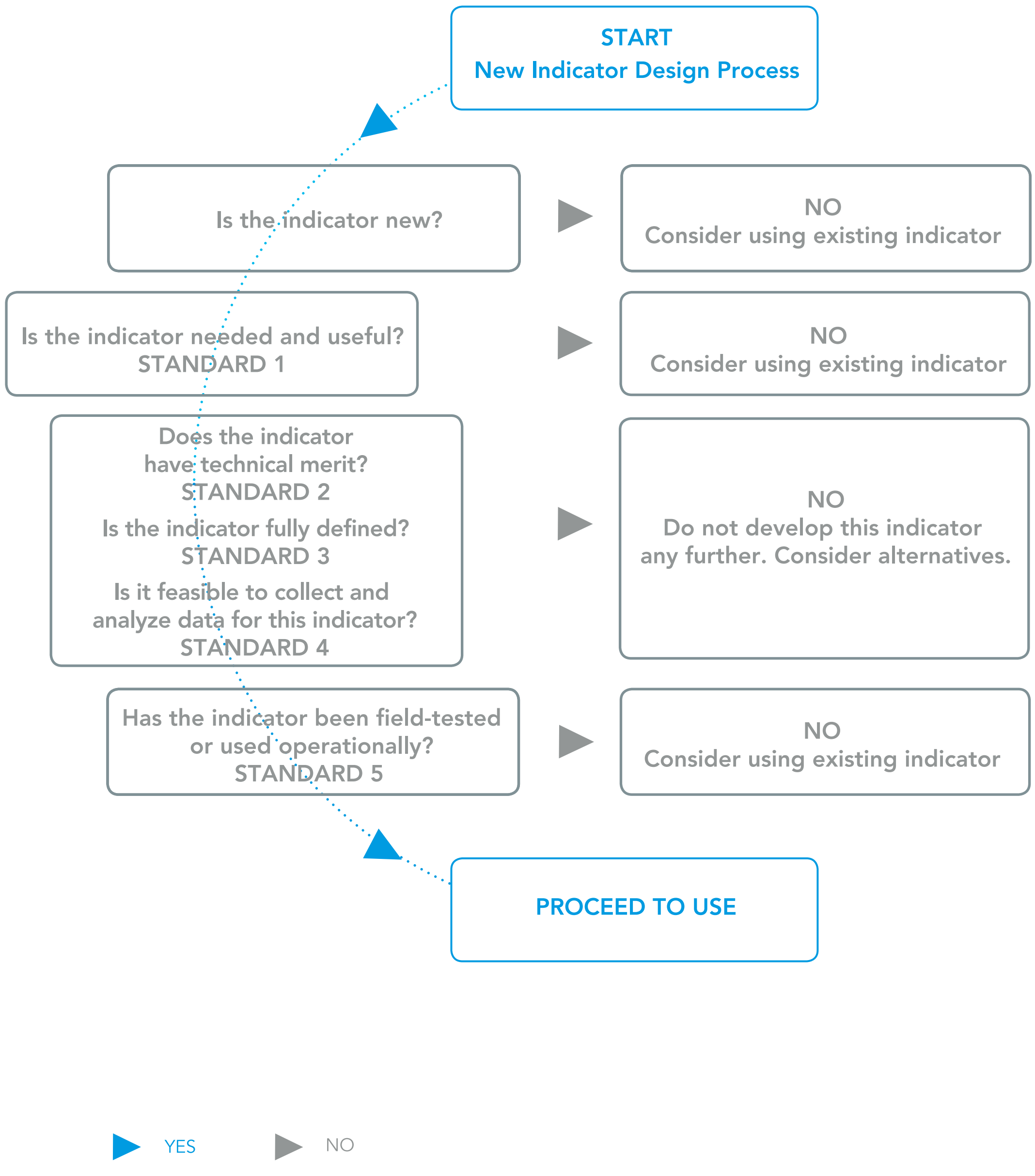
Developing new indicators?

Referring to the standards at this stage makes it more likely that good indicators will be developed, namely those that are feasible and practical to measure at a reasonable cost. It also makes it less likely that new indicators could be introduced that may duplicate or contradict existing indicators. It is recommended that development of new indicators follows a four-step process (see Fig. 1.1):

1. Is the indicator really new? Has it or something similar been defined and used previously?
2. Does the proposed new indicator meet standard 1—that is, is it needed and useful?
3. Does the proposed new indicator meet standards 2–4—that is, does it have technical merit, is it fully defined and is it able to be measured? If it does not meet these standards, it should not be developed further. But, if it does, it should then be field-tested.
4. Does the proposed new indicator meet standard 5—that is, has the indicator been field-tested or used operationally? If the indicator is new, it will not have been used operationally. If a new indicator has not been field-tested, this needs to be conducted. Indicator descriptions need to summarize information on the extent to which the indicator has been used or field-tested.

1 Footnote. It is also envisaged that, in the future, countries may have similar review panels.

Flow chart for designing new indicators



Selecting indicators

The standards and indicator assessment tool may be useful to select indicators to include in indicator sets. This is to ensure that each set has a small number of high-quality indicators. An important resource for locating existing indicators is the UNAIDS' Indicator Registry. [2] If similar indicators exist, it is important to harmonize them with other agencies, so that everyone can measure the same indicator using the same systems and time frames.

Revising and improving indicators

The standards and indicator assessment tool may be useful for those creating or modifying indicators from existing ones. For example, at the national level, the standards may be useful to improve indicators that are used within the national response, to bring them more in line with international standards.

Reviewing indicators

Finally, the standards and indicator assessment tool may be useful when reviewing indicators. In particular, the standards and tool may be useful for those who wish to revise and strengthen existing indicators – for example, in national M&E plans. In many settings, there are existing sets of indicators. These need to be the starting point for the development of a new indicator set. Given that indicators measure the achievement of programme results, indicators should be reviewed and revised when programmes are reviewed—for example, when a new national HIV strategic plan is being developed.

2 Footnote. The Indicator Registry (http://www.indicatorregistry.org) is an online database of indicators used to track the HIV epidemic and response. It was developed to improve 1) access to information on indicators; 2) the management of indicators, including the development of new indicators, the revision of existing indicators and the retirement of out-of-date indicators; 3) the harmonization of indicators; and 4) the selection of appropriate indicators to monitor a country's epidemic and response.

Using the indicator assessment tool to select and review indicators: practical experience?

Since the indicator standards were developed in 2009, they have been used by various governmental, nongovernmental and multilateral organizations to assess a wide range of indicators and indicator sets. The organizations include UNAIDS, the World Health Organization, the United Nations World Food Programme, Global Fund, the United States Government's Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), the United States Agency for Internal Development, the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), the United Kingdom Consortium on AIDS and International Development, and MEASURE Evaluation.

Two of the most significant applications of the indicator standards demonstrate their versatility and robustness. In one example, the standards played a vital role in the development of a new set of indicators related to nutrition and HIV. Another example involves the use of the standards in the assessment of indicators related to linkages between sexual and reproductive health (SRH), and HIV projects and programmes.

Nutrition and HIV

An international team of experts began using the standards early in their process of developing new indicators to track nutrition and HIV issues at global, national and subnational levels. Throughout the process, the development team worked closely with members of MERG's Technical Working Group, to ensure that the indicators reflected the critical points covered by the standards. The collaboration was built around regular consultations with the Working Group throughout the development process, including several informal assessments of individual indicators using the standards. Ultimately, the team submitted fully defined versions of the indicators to the Working Group for a formal review.

An independent panel convened by the Working Group identified several issues with the different indicators, and the development team used this feedback to refine the indicators. The revised indicators were reviewed again and were found to meet the standards, pending more information on their performance in the field. Given the demand for indicators in this topical area, they were provisionally added to the UNAIDS Indicator Registry. In line with the recommendations of the review panel, the indicators are being field-tested in multiple settings in 2014 and may be revised based on the findings from the tests.

SRH–HIV linkages

A multilateral group—which included a broad cross-section of international and national stakeholders and experts—was convened to identify and, if necessary, develop indicators to measure the linkages between SRH and HIV programmes or projects. The goal was to develop a compendium of indicators that would be a useful resource for organizations working at national and subnational levels. The standards were a critical component of an initial assessment of more than 100 potential indicators related to the issues of SRH–HIV linkages.

A subset of indicators that were relevant and preliminarily considered to meet the standards were then reviewed by an independent panel convened by IPPF, which was responsible for managing the process. The panel felt that a number of the indicators did meet the standards and were relevant to SRH–HIV linkages. However, the panel members also identified a gap that they felt required the development of new indicators. In response, the standards were used to develop two indicators that were, in turn, conditionally approved by the review panel. The indicators were then field-tested in multiple countries. The indicators were revised following the field tests, and the IPPF-convened panel found the indicators to meet the standards.

Other examples

Other examples of the use of the indicator standards include:

- An indicator review panel used the standards to assess a set of new HIV-related indicators on stigma and discrimination in 2013.
- Five different indicator panels used the standards to assess indicators during a major revision to the UNAIDS global indicator set in 2009–10.
- The standards were used during the development of new gender indicators in 2013.
- ECDC has used the standards to determine which indicators are appropriate for monitoring the Dublin Declaration on Partnership to Fight HIV/AIDS in Europe and Central Asia.
- The National AIDS Programme in Senegal used a French translation of the standards to assess key indicators in their national set.
- DFID and the UK Consortium have used the standards to assess the utility of existing care and support indicators.

THE INDICATOR ASSESSMENT TOOL

The indicator assessment tool has been developed for assessing indicators against the standards. [3] It consists of a first part, which focuses on the five standards for individual indicators (see the "The indicator standards"). The second part focuses on assessing a complete set of indicators (see Annex 1).

It is acknowledged that using the indicator assessment tool is a rigorous and time-consuming process. Although this may be useful for some groups, such as national indicator review panels, it is recognized that there may be value in having a simplified checklist for use by a wider group, such as during a stakeholder workshop to review indicators within a national M&E plan. A simplified checklist is in Annex 2. It is suggested that this checklist be used as a basis for discussion among stakeholders. A good-quality indicator would expect to score "yes" against each of the nine questions in the checklist.

One of the biggest challenges faced by panels[4] reviewing indicators being able to access the necessary information about the indicator. There has been a great deal of improvement in recent years in terms of more detailed description of indicators; however, information related to other standards is usually not provided in such descriptions. Annex 3 provides a format for indicator review panels to use to request additional information from indicator developers.

A number of systems for scoring indicators against the standards were reviewed when the standards were initially developed. These included star-based and numerical systems. Overall, a scoring system, which assigned an indicator an overall percentage score, was considered most useful. The process of scoring is considered important for indicator review panels because:

- It ensures a degree of rigour that would not be provided by comments alone.
- It allows rapid differentiation between good and poor indicators. This is particularly useful when reviewing large numbers of available indicators.
- It identifies weak areas of particular indicators. For example, an indicator may score poorly against one particular standard.
- Divergent scores between different panel members provide a good basis for discussion.

3 Footnote. A number of versions of the tool were developed for use in different contexts. The version presented here is for use by countries at the national level. Additional versions include those for use at a global level, for assessment of themes and for use by large multinational programmes (see Section 2.1).

4 Footnote. Although these comments apply to all indicator review panels—including those that operate at a global level – in this context, they primarily refer to national panels.

However, there are some concerns about formally publishing indicator scores:

- A single, aggregate score is too simplistic for grading complex indicators.
- The allocation of a score is relatively subjective and may vary among observers.
- An indicator's score could vary markedly depending on context. For example, an indicator could be highly appropriate for one country context, and be inappropriate for another.

One of the most important lessons learned to date from the experience of panels assessing and reviewing indicators against the standards was the importance of qualitative comments made by individual reviewers. These comments have proved particularly useful in identifying areas of weakness in particular indicators and suggesting ways in which they might be improved.

For this reason, it is not proposed to formally publish indicator scores. However, scores are still considered useful for indicator review panels and for developers of indicators during the development process. It is proposed that new indicators would only be added to the Indicator Registry if they meet the indicator standards.

Each indicator is assessed according to a number of criteria by asking a series of questions. The extent to which an indicator meets each criterion produces a score, as specified in the indicator assessment tool (see Annex 1). If information is absent or inadequate to answer a particular question, a score of zero should be recorded.[5] Scores are aggregated across the different criteria within each standard, to produce a score for each standard. Questions and scores vary slightly for different contexts – that is, whether the indicator is being assessed for use in a global, country, thematic or programmatic setting (see Section 2.1). These guidelines focus on use of the indicator assessment tool at national level.

Standard 1: The indicator is needed and useful

Is there evidence that this indicator is needed at national level? (Q1.1–1.2)[6]

Primarily, a country needs indicators to measure the performance of its national HIV response. National-level indicators need to measure performance in the specific areas that are essential for an effective national HIV response. To achieve this, indicators need to be relevant to the country context. In addition, a country needs indicators to measure its performance in implementing international commitments that it has made.

Which stakeholders need and would use the information collected by this indicator? (Q1.3–1.4)

If an indicator is to be of value, it is important that the information it generates is needed by, and is useful, to someone. Good indicators will produce information of value to a range of people, including the various stakeholders involved in managing the national HIV response. Other stakeholders that might use information collected from an indicator will vary according to context, but might include development partners, technical experts and programme managers.

How would information from this indicator be used? (Q1.5) What effect would this information have on planning and decision-making? (Q1.6)

Measuring an indicator can involve considerable time, effort and cost. For such a process to be worthwhile, the information generated needs to be used in some way. This use may involve plans for developing programmes and responses, or for making certain decisions—for example, resource allocation. Some indicators provide information that is essential for a particular context – that is, it would be impossible to implement a particular element of the response effectively without that information. However, some indicators provide information that is helpful—that is, the response can be implemented without the information from that indicator, but it is helpful to have it.

5 Footnote. However, it is hoped that this situation can be avoided by providing the information outlined in Annex 3.
6 Footnote. These notations refer to question numbers within the tool (see Annex 1).

INDICATOR ASSESSMENT AND SCORING

Standard 2: The indicator has technical merit

A good indicator needs to have technical merit. This can be considered in two areas—substantive and monitoring merit. Both of these areas can be assessed by appropriate peer review.

Substantive merit (Q2.1–2.4)

Substantive merit can be assessed by asking what evidence exists to demonstrate that the indicator is technically sound and significant. It is important that the indicator measures something of significance and importance within a particular field, and that the indicator is a clear and focused measure. It should be clear how to interpret changes in the level of the indicator, and the indicator should be sufficiently sensitive to detect changes in performance.

It is possible to consider question 2.1 to be a pivotal question. If the answer to this question is "no", the indicator should not be assessed further.

Monitoring merit (Q2.5–2.6)

Any indicator also needs to make sense from a monitoring perspective. Many of the issues relevant to this are covered under standard 3—the indicator is fully defined (see Section 4.3). In addition, it is important that the indicator is:

- reliable and sensitive. In other words, it produces the same or very similar results, even if measured by different instruments, procedures and/or observers. The indicator has a limited margin of error; and
- is valid and specific. In other words, it accurately measures what it intends to be measured. The indicator is unambiguous; it is not open to more than one interpretation.

Peer review (Q2.7–2.9)

A key process in assessing substantive and monitoring merit is rigorous and exhaustive peer review. It is envisaged that MERG indicator review panels (Annex 3) could be a key resource for peer review processes. Countries may also consider it useful to establish their own indicator review panels. It is essential that all proposed indicators by reviewed by one or more people with the following expertise:

- M&E expertise, to ensure they meet required standards of monitoring merit;
- technical expertise in the thematic area of relevance to a particular indicator; and
- programme expertise

Key national programme managers should review national indicators. The modality and composition of peer review at national level needs to be clearly defined in each country.

For the purpose of this document, it is assumed that the peer reviews were positive – that is, they recommended use of a particular indicator.

Standard 3: The indicator is fully defined

For any indicator to be considered fully defined, it should include all of the elements listed in this section. Given that precise terminology varies in different descriptions of indicators, it is not necessary for the description to include specific terms, as long as the information specified is available.

Title and definition (Q3.1)

For the purpose of this guide, the title is a short summary of the indicator that could be easily used on a day-to-day basis—for example, "Young people: knowledge about HIV prevention". This is also sometimes called a summary title.

For the purpose of this guide, the definition is a clear and brief description of the indicator—for example, "Percentage of young people aged 15–24 who both correctly identify ways of preventing the sexual transmission of HIV and who reject major misconceptions about HIV transmission". This is also sometimes called the full title.

If an indicator is part of an international or global indicator set, it should be stated.

Questions 3.2–3.9

- ***Purpose and rationale (Q3.2)***. There needs to be a statement of what the indicator is for and why it is needed.
- There should be a detailed description of the ***method of measurement (Q3.3)***. Where applicable, this should explain any calculations needed, and what the numerators and denominators for these are.
- ***The collection method (Q3.4)***. How data will be collected for this indicator, including the data source.
- ***The measurement frequency (Q3.5)***. How often this indicator will be measured. This should be consistent with the collection method specified. For example, if information is to come from a survey conducted every two years, the measurement frequency should be every two years and not, for example, monthly or quarterly. If the measurement and reporting frequency differ, this should be stated.
- ***If the indicator's data is to be disaggregated (Q3.6)***—for example, by age or sex, details of how this will be done should be provided.
- ***Guidelines should be provided as to how to interpret (Q3.7)*** changes in the indicator. For example, what does it mean if the indicator shows an increasing level? If there are different possible interpretations, how can these be distinguished?
- ***The strengths and weaknesses (Q3.8)*** of the indicator are stated. In particular, common challenges in measuring the indicator need to be stated, and practical suggestions given on how to overcome these.
- ***Additional sources of information (Q3.9)***, including original descriptions of the indicator, examples of its use in practice and links to any international commitment to which the indicator is attached. This would also include links and/or references to technical background documents, as appropriate.

Standard 4: It is feasible to collect and analyse data for this indicator

There is little point in selecting a technically strong indicator for a national response if it is simply not feasible to measure it because of lack of capacity or resources. This standard has, to date, largely been overlooked by indicator designers. But, this needs to change. A good indicator needs to be one that is feasible to measure with reasonable levels of resources and capacity.

First, ***systems and mechanisms (Q4.1–4.2)*** are needed to collect, interpret and use data for the indicator. Clearly, it should be possible to assess how well these are functioning for existing indicators. Where new indicators are being considered, it may be that the systems and mechanisms needed are already in place for other similar indicators—for example, adding a question to an existing household survey. For national contexts, consideration needs to be given to systems and mechanisms in that country.

Second, one of the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness is that development partners will align their support to countries' national development strategies, institutions and procedures. In this context, it refers to the one national HIV M&E system (Q4.3). Therefore, good indicators are those that are included in national M&E systems.

Finally, evidence is required that financial and human resources ***(Q4.4) are available to allow an indicator to be measured and that the benefits of measuring the indicator are worth the costs (Q4.5)***. It is recognized that cost-effectiveness assessments can be difficult and subjective. Therefore, this element has been included because of the tendency to recommend tracking multiple indicators with little attention to the cost of measuring them relative to the benefits gained.

Standard 5: The indicator has been field-tested or used in practice

Indicators, which appear sound on paper, may turn out to have significant problems when they are used in practice. For this reason, it is important that new indicators are ***field-tested (Q5.1)***. For existing indicators, extensive use in practice will provide the same information as field-testing, based on user experience. For national contexts, the ideal situation is that the indicator will have been used in the country itself. In some cases, this will not be so and therefore other countries' experiences may need to be relied on.

Finally, it is important that indicators are subject to ***periodic review (Q5.2)***. This will detect problems with indicators, such as non-availability of data or lack of ability to discriminate between different standards of performance. In addition, situations may change—meaning that an indicator needs to be changed, discarded or added. For example, development of new treatments or changes in programmatic practices might require such changes.

Standard 6: The indicator set is coherent and balanced overall

Indicators rarely function independently. They are often incorporated into sets. In a country, such a set is likely to be the basis of the national monitoring system for HIV. Different sets may have some of the same indicators. For example, many countries have incorporated indicators from the United Nations General Assembly Special Session into their national M&E systems.

Although a good indicator set requires good individual indicators, it does not necessarily mean that a set comprised of good indicators is a good set. There could be too many indicators or too many of a particular type. A key indicator could be missing. It is important, therefore, to have a standard for assessing sets of indicators.

A good set of indicators should give an ***overall picture of the adequacy or otherwise of the response being measured (Q6.1–6.3)***. At the national level, the indicator set should allow the country to:

- assess the adequacy of its national HIV response;
- report on its HIV-related international commitments; and
- compare its performance with other similar countries

Sets should ***cover all key elements of the response being assessed (Q6.4–6.6)***. Appropriate weight should be given to the different elements of a national response or programme. For example, an indicator set might be considered unbalanced if it had six indicators for one element, yet no indicator for an equally important element. A national indicator set primarily needs to be relevant to its own country context. For example, if the epidemic is spreading more among particular populations, indicators need to be selected that reflect this.

An indicator set should have an ***appropriate mix of indicators (Q6.7–6.8)*** at different monitoring levels. For example, there should be indicators to assess inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts. There should be a mix of indicators that measure both the quantity and the quality of the services provided. The demand to measure everything needs to be balanced against what is feasible and desirable with available resources. There needs to be a ***reasonable number of indicators (Q6.9)*** for each context.

It is important to understand that an individual indicator may be part of more than one indicator set. Indeed, with increasing harmonization, it is hoped that this will be the case more often. In particular, principles of alignment mean that global, thematic and programmatic sets of indicators should be based on indicators included in national HIV M&E systems.

ANNEX 1: INDICATOR STANDARDS: ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR NATIONAL SETTINGS

Standard 1: The indicator is needed and useful

Score the stated number of points for each of the following. (Points are awarded by the review panel based on their evaluation of the information provided.)

1.1–1.2 Is there evidence that this indicator is needed at national level?

1.1 This indicator measures performance against the goals, objectives or results of the national HIV strategy or a key international commitment. (1 point)

1.2 This indicator is relevant to the country context. (1 point)

1.3–1.4 Which stakeholders need and would use the information collected by this indicator?

1.3 This indicator is accepted and used by all major international partners supporting work in this technical area in the country. (1 point)

1.4 This indicator produces information that is needed by and useful to national stakeholders. (1 point)

1.5 How would information from this indicator be used?

Information from this indicator would be helpful or essential for those managing the national HIV response. (helpful—1 point; essential—2 points)

1.6 What effect would this information have on planning and decision-making?

Information from this indicator is helpful or essential at national level to allow decisions to be made in terms of programme development and resource allocation. (helpful—1 point; essential—2 points)

1.7 Is this information available from other indicators?

This information is not available from other indicators. (1 point)

1.8–1.10 Is this indicator harmonized with other indicators—for example, those being used by others in the country?

This indicator is fully harmonized with other similar indicators in use in the country in the same technical field regarding:

- 1.8 a detailed description (1 point)
- 1.9 systems for data collection (1 point)
- 1.10 time frames for data collection. (1 point)

ANNEX 1: INDICATOR STANDARDS: ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR NATIONAL SETTINGS

Standard 2: The indicator has technical merit

Score the stated number of points for each of the following. (Points are awarded by the review panel based on their evaluation of the information provided.)

2.1–2.4 Does the indicator have substantive merit?

2.1 The indicator is significant and important within a particular technical field. (1 point)

2.2 The indicator provides a clear and focused measure of progress in a particular technical area. (1 point)

2.3 There is a clear understanding of what changes in the value of the indicator mean, how they should be interpreted and what kind of action to take as a result. (1 point)

2.4 The indicator is sensitive to pickup changes in performance. (1 point)

2.5–2.6 Does the indicator have monitoring merit?

2.5 The indicator is reliable and sensitive. (1 point)

2.6 The indicator is valid and specific. (1 point)

2.7–2.9 Has the indicator been peer reviewed?

The indicator has been reviewed by:

- 2.7 people with expertise in the relevant technical area (1 point)
- 2.8 people with M&E expertise, particularly including indicator design (1 point)
- 2.9 key national programme managers. (1 point)

Standard 3: The indicator is fully defined

Score the stated number of points for each of the following. (Points are awarded by the review panel based on their evaluation of the information provided.)

3.1–3.9 Is the indicator fully defined?

3.1 The indicator has a clearly stated title and definition. (2 points)

3.2 The indicator has a clearly stated purpose and rationale. (2 points)

3.3 The method of measurement for the indicator is clearly defined, including the description of the numerator, denominator and calculation, where applicable. (4 points)

3.4 The data collection method for the indicator is clearly stated. (1 point)

3.5 The measurement frequency for the indicator is clearly defined. (1 point)

3.6 Any relevant data disaggregation is clearly defined. (1 point)

3.7 There are clear guidelines to interpret and use data from this indicator. (1 point)

3.8 Strengths, weaknesses and challenges in using the indicator are clearly stated. (1 point)

3.9 Relevant sources of additional information on the indicator are cited. (1 point)

Standard 4: It is feasible to collect and analyse data for this indicator

Score the stated number of points for each of the following. (Points are awarded by the review panel based on their evaluation of the information provided.)

4.1–4.2 How well are the systems, tools and mechanisms—which are required to collect, interpret and use data for this indicator—functioning?

4.1 Systems and mechanisms needed to collect data for this indicator are functioning in the country. (3 points)

4.2 Systems and mechanisms needed to interpret and use data for this indicator are functioning in the country. (3 points)

4.3 How would this indicator be integrated into a national M&E framework and system?

This indicator is already included in the national HIV M&E system. (3 points)

4.4 To what extent are the financial and human resources available to measure this indicator?

Financial (1 point) and human (1 point) resources are available to measure this indicator.

4.5 What evidence exists that measuring this indicator is worth the cost?

Measuring this indicator is worth the cost. (1 point)

ANNEX 1: INDICATOR STANDARDS: ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR NATIONAL SETTINGS

Standard 5: The indicator has been field-tested or used in practice

Score the stated number of points for each of the following. (Points are awarded by the review panel based on their evaluation of the information provided.)

5.1 To what extent has the indicator been field tested or used in practice?

The indicator has been field-tested or used in practice in:

- the country's national programme (3 point)
- countries with similar epidemics—for example, in the region (2 point)
- other countries. (1 point)

Standard 6: The indicator set is coherent and balanced overall

Score the stated number of points for each of the following. (Points are awarded by the review panel based on their evaluation of the information provided.)

6.1–6.3 Does the indicator set give an overall picture of the adequacy or otherwise of the response being measured?

Data from this set of indicators allow:

- 6.1 assessment of the adequacy of the national response to HIV (1 point)
- 6.2 the country to compare its performance with that of other similar countries (1 point)
- 6.3 the country to report on all its HIV-related international commitments. (1 point)

6.4–6.6 Does the indicator set have an appropriate balance of indicators across elements of the response?

The indicator set:

- 6.4 covers all elements of the national response to HIV with no gaps (1 point)
- 6.5 gives appropriate weight to elements of the national HIV response (1 point)
- 6.6 is relevant to the national context. (1 point)

6.7–6.8 Does the indicator set cover different M&E levels appropriately?

The indicator set contains an appropriate mix of indicators measuring:

- 6.7 inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts (1 point)
- 6.8 quantitative and qualitative elements. (1 point)

6.9 Is the number of indicators reasonable?

The number of indicators is reasonable. (1 point)

- 6.7 inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts (1 point)
- 6.8 quantitative and qualitative elements. (1 point)

ANNEX 2: SIMPLIFIED NATIONAL CHECKLIST

This checklist should be used as a basis for discussion among stakeholders. A quality indicator would expect to score "yes" against each of these nine questions.

It is important to note, however, that this checklist is not intended to replace the fuller indicator assessment tool given in Annex 1. The checklist is designed for rapid use by a broader group of stakeholders, and as a precursor to the detailed and rigorous application of the assessment tool by a national indicator review panel.

1. Is this indicator needed to measure performance against the national HIV strategy or a key international commitment?
2. Is it clear how data from this indicator will be used to manage the national response to HIV?
3. Is this indicator harmonized with other similar indicators already in use in the country?
4. Is there consensus among technical experts that this indicator should be monitored?
5. Does this indicator reliably measure what it is intended to measure?
6. Is the indicator fully defined? (See note.)
7. Are systems available to allow this indicator to be measured?
8. Are adequate human and financial resources available to allow this indicator to be measured?
9. Has this indicator been used in practice?[7]

Note: to be fully defined, an indicator should have:

- a title and definition;
- a purpose and rationale;
- a measurement method;
- a data collection method;
- a measurement frequency;
- data disaggregation;
- guidelines for interpretation and use;
- strengths, weaknesses and challenges; and
- sources of further information.

7 Footnote. In this checklist, "use in practice" could include rigorous and extensive field testing of a new indicator.

ANNEX 3: INDICATOR INFORMATION SHEET

MERG has a number of indicator review panels that can, on request, review individual indicators and indicator sets. These panels can independently assess the extent to which proposed indicators comply with a focused set of internationally agreed standards.

To aid an indicator review panel with their assessment, it would be helpful if the party requesting the review could supply a detailed description for each indicator, including:

- the title and definition;
- the purpose and rationale;
- the method of measurement;
- the collection method;
- the measurement frequency;
- details on how data from the indicator would be disaggregated;
- guidelines on how to interpret data from the indicator;
- brief notes on the strengths and weaknesses of the indicator;
- brief notes on challenges faced in using the indicator; and
- any additional sources of information for the indicator.

In addition, it would be helpful if answers to the following questions were provided for each indicator:

- How will data from this indicator be used?
- What steps have been taken to ensure this indicator is harmonized with other indicators?
- What process has been followed to ensure the technical value of this indicator?
- What evidence is there that it will be feasible to track this indicator? (Please provide estimates of the systems and resources required.)
- Where is this indicator currently being used? Where has it been field-tested?

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