



**Sustainable Development Solution Network (SDSN) Public Consultation on
Indicators for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

**NORRAG commentaries related to livelihoods and skills for employment in the
proposed indicators**

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Commentary # 1. By Claudio de Moura Castro, Positivo, Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

Looking at [this collection of indicators](#), each reader will likely find that his own area is insufficiently covered. That is to be expected. Hence, considering my past interest in training, it should be no surprise that I find that the subject has been short changed.

The major indicator of training activities appears as something that youth may be doing, instead of being unemployed or in the informal sector. By any stretch of the imagination, this piece of information is too meager, considering that training – in all its manifestations - is a time-consuming, enormously expensive endeavor and a major determinant of productivity.

Training should be treated as a stand-alone and legitimate complement to academic education and given more attention. As it stands, it is almost an after-thought, without a life of its own. It is merely something people do, instead of being idle.

Indicators should help us understand the world. If all we know is that training fills the time of some youth, we miss on the critical question: Do those who have had training in the past have better chances of not being in the NEET category?

The suggested indicator of training – now rechristened as school-to-work programs – is quite slippery. It purports to “measure the proportion of adolescents who are offered programs that enable them to transition from school to employability and work...”.

Suppose that the entire country has 10 vacancies for training – in whatever. Suppose all youth are offered a place and all of them refuse to take it. According to the indicator, 100% of youth have been offered school-to-work programs. Perfection!

Suppose we interpret differently the definition and consider only those programs that effectively lead to jobs. What about all the youth who enrolled in training programs and could not find a job afterwards? Even though they cost money, those programs do not exist?

To disconnect the school-to-work programs from regular education is quite a task. The Dual System is what? And Technical Schools? And the Comprehensive High Schools of the United States? In the real world, the difference between success and failure in leading youth to meaningful jobs lies in the good fit between the solutions and the problems. Unless we understand the intricacies and merits of each scheme, there is little we can learn. Therefore, creating such a lame indicator is of little help in dealing with the NEET issue.

Another difficulty is the treatment of the informal sector as the ugly nemesis of meaningful employment. Decades after the first papers on the informal sector were written, under the umbrella of the ILO, it is quite disappointing to see such a naïve and narrow use of the concept.

In more traditional societies, the standard mode of employment is defined today as informal. And it still survives, in the case in many jobs, all over the world. And it is real employment in real jobs. Some are demeaning, some are not.

To illustrate the definitional quandaries, why is so little said about the informal sector in the United States? One of the reasons is the high flexibility of legal employment in that nation. The same job would be classified as informal in most other countries.

One should not associate the informal sector with poverty or precariousness. What about youth who work in family business, helping in a thousand different ways? In countries where formal employment entails much higher costs for the employers, by mutual consent, to work without a contract is a better deal for both sides – sometimes, in high paying jobs.

A case in point is the university professor who engages in consultancy, with no formal contracts. Is that not to be considered the informal sector?

To sum up, the impression one gathers from examining what the paper includes in training suggests that, indeed, the issue has been short-changed. Compared to the more complete and plentiful indicators of education, what is included in training is too little and too muddled to be of any use for policy making.

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On 14th February 2014, the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) released [a draft report for public consultation](#) on proposed indicators for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We asked several NORRAG members to comment on these proposed indicators; these commentaries are the views and opinions of individual NORRAG members and are not intended to represent the view of all NORRAG members.



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