

A data validation mechanism for TOSSD – Preliminary proposal

TOSSD Task Force Issues Paper¹ - Agenda item 4
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Introduction

1. At the 17th TOSSD Task Force meeting, members approved² the inclusion of a data validation mechanism in TOSSD following a data pilot³ that compared TOSSD data with data from the local public financial systems of three countries: Bangladesh, Cameroon and Colombia. The Secretariat was tasked to follow up with a detailed proposal on how the data validation mechanism could be implemented in practice, for discussion at the next TOSSD Task Force meeting.

2. This paper presents a preliminary proposal for a data validation mechanism in TOSSD. Section I provides the rationale for a TOSSD data validation mechanism. Section II suggests some basic principles and a concrete process for this mechanism. Finally, section III suggests a way forward for the future implementation of the mechanism.

I. Rationale for a data validation mechanism

3. The rationale for building a data validation mechanism in TOSSD can be summarised as follows, based on the data pilot carried out with Bangladesh, Cameroon and Colombia as well as previous discussions within the Task Force:

- **A long-standing request by recipient countries:** by implementing a data validation mechanism, TOSSD would respond to a long-standing request by recipient countries to comment on the data published internationally on support provided to them. TOSSD could allow – for the first time – recipient countries to have their say on both the methodology⁴ and the data on official support for sustainable development. While countries and institutions providing support will continue to report TOSSD data, recipient countries can be called to verify the data and propose any needed adjustments. TOSSD can act as a platform that allows recipient and provider countries to discuss and improve data accuracy and completeness.

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² See Item 6 in the [action points of the 17th TOSSD Task Force meeting](#).

³ See [Total Official Support for Sustainable Development – Data comparison study for Bangladesh, Cameroon and Colombia](#)

⁴ Through the Task Force, TOSSD already offers the opportunity for recipient countries to influence the TOSSD methodology.

- **A data review mechanism would be mutually beneficial for TOSSD and for recipient countries:** recipient countries have at their disposal critical information about the activities implemented at the national level (e.g. more detailed descriptions, SDG focus, channel names, disbursed amounts). A data verification mechanism, therefore, has the potential to strengthen the robustness of TOSSD data, increase their use in recipient countries and ultimately enhance the TOSSD standard for the benefit of recipient countries. Data validation by recipient countries is also a key feature in the agreed indicator 17.3.1.⁵
- **A data review/validation is technically feasible.** The data pilot showed a high level of comparability of data between TOSSD and the local datasets. This opens the possibility to build a system for data validation or feedback by the countries receiving support.

II. Concrete proposal for the validation mechanism

A. Suggested principles for the mechanism

4. To establish a TOSSD data verification mechanism by recipient countries, it may be helpful for the Task Force to discuss basic principles for this mechanism.

5. The Secretariat proposes the following principles, based on the data pilot and preliminary discussions held within the Task Force:

- The mechanism may need to be called a data “verification” or data “review” mechanism, rather than a data “validation” mechanism.** In fact, all data (close to 319 000 activities in 2020) could not be reasonably “validated” by all recipient countries for every year. Even a data “validation” mechanism implemented for a small number of countries every year would significantly delay the release of TOSSD data.
- The mechanism should be an ex-post mechanism,** i.e. the data should be reviewed once they are published on [tossd.online](https://tossd.org). A data verification by recipient countries prior to their publication would add a step in the collection process, which would significantly delay the release of TOSSD information every year.
- The mechanism should be administratively as light as possible.** The mechanism should consider local contexts in recipient countries, including capacity issues (technical, material or human-related), as well as political and technical processes.
- Participation by recipient countries should be voluntary.** This will help to ensure that recipient countries are able to dedicate the time, human and technical resources needed for the data review, thereby ensuring a **high level of ownership**. However, it is likely that **only a small number of recipient countries will be able to review their data every year** at least in the short term, due to limited resources.
- Both providers and recipients involved in the mechanism should be ready to dedicate the necessary resources to carry out the verifications.** For example, the provider and recipient countries should dedicate a part-time focal point from their administration to participate in the mechanism. Success in implementing this mechanism will depend on the active participation of both developing countries and TOSSD reporters.

⁵ See Section 4.d. in [Metadata-17-03-01.pdf \(un.org\)](#), which explicitly requests OECD and UNCTAD “to establish mechanisms for validation based on the sustainable development criteria applied for this indicator, which will adequately support concerns of the recipient countries”.

- f. **Potential decisions to modify the TOSSD data should be taken jointly by the recipient and the TOSSD reporter.** The Secretariat, possibly also the co-Chairs, could act as facilitators in this process.
- g. **The mechanism should include all relevant actors, especially those involved in the activities flagged for review by the recipient country.** These actors could include CSOs, as well as other actors as appropriate (e.g. local representatives, parliamentarians, private sector). This will help to ensure a broad consensus on the activities included in TOSSD.
- h. **The data review mechanism should be appropriately funded.** As of now, the data review mechanism is not included in the work plan and budget. The cost of implementing the mechanism would depend on 1) the number of recipient countries to be covered each year; 2) the number of activities subject to review; 3) the final agreed process (the workload can vary greatly depending on the process). In practice, a phased implementation of the mechanism should be envisaged (e.g. starting with a few countries and/or smaller databases and progressively increase the number of recipient countries every year).
- i. **The mechanism should be considered as part and parcel of the data collection process of TOSSD.** This means that it should be included in the Reporting Instructions and mentioned in the Terms of Reference / Standard operating procedures of the future TOSSD governance arrangement (currently under discussion in the Task Force).

B. Suggested process for the mechanism

6. The Secretariat suggests the following process for the mechanism:

- a. **Call for expressions of interest:** After the TOSSD data release of year Y, the TOSSD Secretariat will invite recipient countries' governments to express their interest in participating in the mechanism. The call for expressions of interest will include links to specific guidance to explain the mechanism, but also the TOSSD data and its methodology. The invitation will be disseminated by e-mail and through social media. Engagement with relevant regional organisations may also be used to disseminate invitations to recipient countries. NSOs should also be made aware of the call, given their centrality in the monitoring of the SDGs.
- b. **Selection of countries to be included in the review mechanism for year Y:** The Task Force will discuss every year the countries to be included in the mechanism, based on options presented by the TOSSD Secretariat (in case too many countries responded to the call for expressions of interest, the Task Force could develop specific selection criteria e.g. geographical balance).
- c. **Kick-off of the data validation/verification/review with selected recipient countries:** The Secretariat will contact the focal points in the selected recipient countries and organise a kick-off meeting. During this meeting, the Secretariat will confirm with the recipient country the process, scope (e.g. the entire TOSSD database for one or several years, a specific year, a specific set of reporters, etc.) and timing of the review. The Secretariat will then send the data to the country for review.

- d. **Review and feedback by the recipient country.** The focal point in the recipient country will gather feedback on the TOSSD file from the national entities involved and send it back to the TOSSD Secretariat. The recipient country will be able to provide feedback on any reporting item of the TOSSD data file⁶. The TOSSD Secretariat will review the file and based on it will suggest to the recipient country focal point and TOSSD reporter, a process to organise a validation of changes with relevant parties.
- e. **Joint review/verification/validation.** The TOSSD Secretariat, the recipient country focal point and the TOSSD reporters will organise a series of meetings and will exchange e-mails to agree on a final dataset. This process could involve a wide range of stakeholders such as national entities in the recipient or provider country, CSOs, etc. depending on the activities discussed.
- f. **Adjustments and upload of new file.** Once there is an agreement on a final data file, data will be adjusted in the TOSSD database as appropriate. Recipient and provider countries will also be invited to update their national databases as appropriate. Potential changes or adjustments in TOSSD data might have an impact on data reported for SDG 17.3.1 indicator, as well as other current and future indicator frameworks in which TOSSD is a data source (e.g. Global Compact on Migration). In case the review demonstrates the need of further refinements to the TOSSD methodology, these refinements will be presented for discussion at the TOSSD Task Force.

7. The data review mechanism is likely to take place in the first semester of every year, after the release of TOSSD data⁷.

8. In addition to the above mechanism, the Secretariat will post on the TOSSD website a permanent invitation to recipient countries to provide feedback on the TOSSD data, by sending an e-mail to the generic TOSSD Secretariat address.

III. Suggested way forward

- 9. The Secretariat suggests three follow-up activities after the 18th meeting of the TOSSD Task Force:
 - a. **Suggest first concrete text for the Reporting Instructions** at the next Task Force meeting, based on the discussion at the 18th meeting.
 - b. **In 2023, organise an online consultation workshop on the data review mechanism.** The Secretariat suggests organising a workshop specifically with recipient countries to:
 - i. Get feedback on the suggested principles and process for the mechanism.
 - ii. Explore ways to identify and maintain a list of focal points in recipient countries. The Secretariat will also investigate the possibility of leveraging existing networks

⁶ The establishment of a data review mechanism highlights the necessity to reflect on a broad capacity building programme for recipient countries, that would include support for carrying out the mechanism, but also more broadly on the use of TOSSD data at country level.

⁷ At present, during the second semester, the TOSSD Task Force Secretariat is mainly dedicated to the processing of TOSSD data.

from regional organisations (e.g. UN regional commissions) to help provide a list of focal points in recipient countries.

- iii. Reflect on a possible guidance note for recipients and providers regarding the mechanism, including possible standard questions on how the recipient country may want to review the TOSSD data file.
- c. **Test the mechanism:** based on the availability of funds, the mechanism (principles and process) could be tested in 2023 with a few recipient countries. Feedback on the outcome, best practices and lessons learned would then be presented to the Task Force as an input to future rounds of data review.

Issues for discussion

Task Force members are invited to comment on the proposal based on the following questions:

- **Does the Task Force agree with the proposed principles for the mechanism (section II.A)?** In particular:
 - Are there any principles that should be amended, added, or removed?
 - What term should be used for the mechanism: data “validation”, “review”, or “verification” mechanism?
- **Does the Task Force agree with the proposed process for the mechanism (section II.B)?**
- **Does the Task Force agree or have any suggestion on the suggested way forward (Section III.)?**