Methods:

Measurement and the SDGS

Debbi Long
EU Centre, RMIT

I acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations as the traditional owners of the unceded land of Naarm/Melbourne on which RMIT stands and where I am located.

I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and to First Nations people who are with us today.

- Measurement: Why
- Measurement: How
- Metrics in an SDG
- Conflations and Mutings
- Alternate Conceptualisations

Measurement: Why

SDGS: tools for transformation

If things are going to change, things have got to change

To understand if strategies of transformation are actually transforming things, we need to measure "befores" and "afters"

Transparency

Accountability

Measurement: How

Measurement treated as binary/hybrid

• Qualitative

• Quantitative

• Mixed Methods

quant frequently privileged over qual

Difference between how agencies and universities treat methods – difference between theory and applied

• Big Data: a whole new ball game
Not yet applied systemically to SDGs (as far as I'm aware)

The Map is not the Terrain

Numbers are not always the best way of measuring

Focusing on Metrics has an opportunity cost:
it can silence other aspects

metrics

end or reduce: targets are expressed in metrics

- reduce maternal mortality to less than 70 deaths per 100,000 live births
- reduce non communicable disease mortality by one third

most other goals are also tied to indicators expressed in metrics

- SDG 3.A.1: prevalence of tobacco use, is used as an indicator for SDG 3.A strengthening adherence to the tobacco framework

a small number have indicators that are either more qualitative, or rely on more complex correlations

- SDG 3.8.1: coverage of essential health services, is provided as an indicator for SDG 3.8: achieve universal health care

SDG 3 Health – the Aims

hint for measurement analysis: look at the verbs in the aims

The 13 goals included in the health SDG aim to, by 2030:

end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 (SDG 3.2); AIDS, TB, malaria and neglected tropical diseases (3.3)

reduce global maternal mortality rate (3.1); premature mortality from non-communicable diseases (3.4); deaths and injury from road traffic accidents (3.6); deaths and illness from hazardous chemicals and pollution (3.9)

combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases (3.3)

promote mental health and well-being (3.4)

support research & development and accessibility of vaccines and medicines for communicable and non-communicable diseases (3.B); increase health funding and heath workforce capacity (3.C)

strengthen prevention and treatment of substance abuse (3.5); implementation of tobacco Control Framework (3.A) and early warning, risk reduction and management systems (3.D)

ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health programs (3.7)

achieve universal health coverage (3.8)

Gaps in SDG3

hint for measurement analysis: look at the gap in the aims

- politics of food supply as crucial to health

- the sparse attention paid to mental health

- insufficient attention paid to nonbinary gender constructions

- lack of conflict-related health issues in SDG3, including enormous challenges in health of displaced people

- climate change related health risks not explicitly included in the health SDG

- inadequate attention to specific health vulnerabilities of indigenous peoples, including health threats from settler colonialism, land theft, extractive mining and industrial agriculture and infrastructure projects

- risk reduction strategies heavily focussed on infectious disease, with insufficient attention:
  - threat of nuclear weapons and technologies
  - climate change
  - conflict

structural
ethnocentrism

conflation

muting

Conflation

SDG 1 Poverty

1.1
By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than $1.25 a day

"less than $1.25 a day" conflated with "poverty"

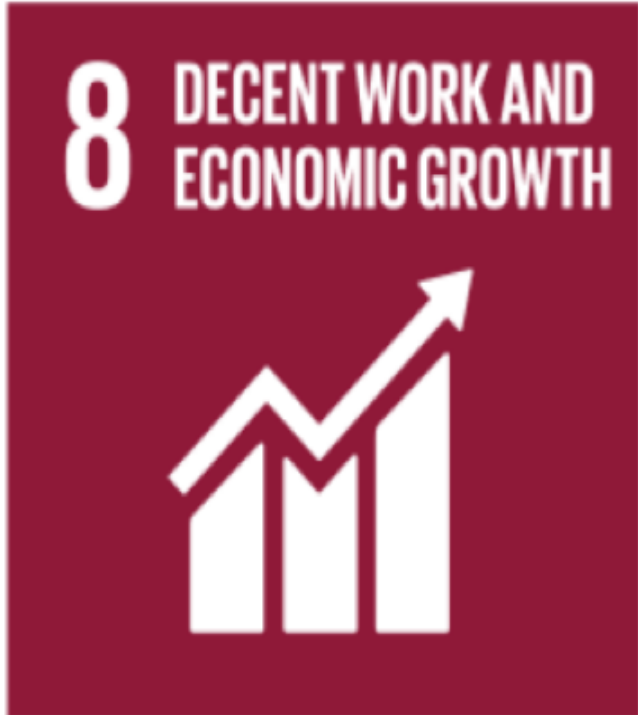monetary income conflated with income/resources

Conflation

SDG 1 Poverty

"However, social protection is not a reality for a large majority of the world's population. In 2016, 55 per cent – as many as 4 billion people – were not covered by any social protection cash benefits, with large variations across regions: from 87 per cent without coverage in sub-Saharan Africa to 14 per cent in Europe and Northern America."
(progress & info 2019)

"social protection" conflated with "social protection cash benefits"

Conflation

8.5

By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value

8.3

Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services

"decent work" conflated with "decent livelihood"

Conflation

9.3

Increase the access of small-scale industrial and other enterprises, in particular in developing countries, to financial services, including affordable credit, and their integration into value chains and markets

"access to financial services" conflated with "development"

re-imagining of financial distribution could, for example, include reparations for as yet unacknowledged colonial thefts

Muting

7B

By 2030, expand infrastructure and upgrade technology for supplying modern and sustainable energy services for all in developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States, and land-locked developing countries, in accordance with their respective programmes of support

"modern and sustainable" potentially mutes "appropriateness"

Muting

4.5

By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

Mainstream education not acknowledged as unsafe for many members of vulnerable groups.

Muting

16.3

Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all

phrases such as "rule of law"; "equal justice for all" mutes lived experience of colonised peoples and police

Muting

16.4

By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime

mutes the fact that many lives are lost through legal arms deals, with many developed nations, including European nations, USA and Australia, benefitting economically from arms manufacture

mutes the fact that far and away the largest amount of 'stolen assets' are assets (including land and resources accessed through extractive mining on traditional lands) stolen from indigenous peoples by modern nation states

The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house ...

they will never allow us to bring about genuine change.

Audre Lorde

For the Global Goals to be truly global they have to be able to provide communities with sustainable solutions that are both environmentally and culturally appropriate.

While many of the goals and targets of the SDGs can be applied universally to all human societies, a number are specific to western-style industrialised societies.

Given that the current climate crisis can be traced back to European-initiated industrialisation, the epistemological framework from which the current crisis is descended is inadequate - on its own - to provide solutions which will take us into a transformed, sustainable world.

A note on fragility …

POC, i(I)ndigenous peoples, and people inhabiting other non-dominant identities frequently need to "do the work" of "protecting" the feelings of dominant-group people.

It can be challenging for people who are well intentioned to be "accused" of ethnocentrism.

Tuana's "epistemologies of ignorance"

Reasons we may choose not to know:
- In historical and/or contemporary denial
- Vested interests
- It makes things more complex

Epistemologies of Ignorance: non-accidental gaps in knowledge

Strength of Global Goals: prepared to embrace complexity in ways not seen before in high-level development policy.

Environmental Personhood

- Ecuador
- Whanganui River
- Bolivia
- Ganges River

Conversation article: Environmental Personhood

there is value in engaging
with the indicators -
ticking the boxes

AND

there is value in engaging
critically with the indicators –
thinking outside the box