

Brief Summary of the second OWG Concluding Remarks for Co-Chairs

19 April 2013

- We have had a rich three days of discussions. Thanks to all of you for engaging actively and occasionally interactively – even more interaction would be encouraged in future sessions.
- We are still in early days of our stock taking, so it is too soon to identify more than the broad outlines of some emerging areas of convergence of views, if not yet consensus.
- At this early stage, diversity of views is a good thing. We are engaged in a project of joint innovation. We need and want new thinking. We all agree that our task is to gradually craft the backbone of the transformation agenda.
- Of course the MDGs are one important touchstone for our work, inevitably a point of departure. There is much to learn from—and build upon—in the MDGs. But I think we can agree they will not be enough. We are entering uncharted waters. This makes our work both exciting and challenging.
- I sense that early anxiety is giving way to growing intellectual curiosity.
- So, let me try briefly to capture both the rich diversity of the viewpoints we have heard over the past few days as well as the areas where our understandings may be converging.
- I'll begin with conceptual aspects of the SDGs and then move to poverty eradication, before concluding with a few observations on process going forward.

Conceptual aspects of SDGs

The first question we have been asking ourselves the past 3 days is: Why the SDGs? What is the value they add to the MDGs? We've heard answers from many of you. If I may attempt to summarize, we have heard that:

- We must conclude any unfinished business of the MDGs, and set a goal of complete eradication of poverty in a clear timeframe.
- Many of you noted that we are unlikely to reach that goal in a sustainable way if we do not address the economic, social and environmental factors that make for durable poverty eradication.
- So, integration of the three dimensions is a critical means to sustainable poverty eradication and people-centred development.
- A number of you have noted that, in an interdependent world where human activities in one part of the world can have consequences for people living in other parts, we need to look at the full range of our activities that have a bearing

on sustainable poverty eradication – enhancing the positive impacts of our actions and minimizing the negative ones.

- This calls for strong cooperative global action. As one speaker noted, the SDGs can be a useful means of setting priorities for such cooperative action. Also, we were reminded that, while the SDGs are expected to be central to the post-2015 development agenda, they are not synonymous with that agenda. They need to be embedded in a broader narrative – as some said, a narrative of the transformative change needed to realize our vision of sustainable poverty eradication and universal human development, respecting human dignity and protecting our planet, mother Earth, living in harmony with nature for the well-being and happiness of present and future generations.

Principles of SDGs

- Many of you reiterated that the Rio principles should guide the formulation of the SDGs, including the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.
- At Rio+20 it was agreed that the SDGs would be based on Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and fully respect all Rio principles.
- Several of you reiterated that the SDGs must be consistent with international law.
- There was broad agreement that the SDGs should build upon commitments already made and should contribute to implementation of outcomes of all major summits in the economic, social and environmental fields.
- It was also broadly recognized that defining SDGs is not the occasion for negotiating or renegotiating existing agreements, treaties that are under the responsibility of other international fora and processes.
- It is also self-evident that OWG has not been created to take over the role of other existing bodies. It will build upon their results of and incorporate the lessons into its deliberations.

Characteristics of SDGs

Regarding the characteristics of the SDGs, many points stand out:

- We face a challenge in keeping the agenda focused. We were reminded that the attraction of the MDGs was precisely their sharp focus.
- Defining the SDGs is a way to **prioritize** – to identify what are the critical problems we want to address, critical goals we need to set, and the critical actions we need to take, to achieve the future we want.
- Thus, the SDGs are not meant to solve everything, but they are meant to address the most important things in our collective view.
- This is where the **narrative is so important**. Development is a complex process

of structural change a complex way how to combine growth with progress — there are no magic bullets; even more so with sustainable development, which, as some of you observed, no country has yet successfully achieved.

- We need to be faithful to the complexity in the narrative and in our broad post-2015 agenda, while aiming for ***simplicity*** in the goals we set ourselves.
- Many noted how important it is to retain this positive feature of the MDGs. Not to do so could jeopardize the chances of success. As one of you said, ideally the SDGs should be “tweetable”.
- We are all agreed on the ***universality of the SDGs***, but we may have different understandings of how that should be reflected in the goals.
 - Many share the view that the **SDGs must speak not only to developing countries but also to developed countries**, and not just in terms of conventional development cooperation, important as that is. Shared responsibilities are broader if we are to achieve sustainable poverty eradication and development. Many of you mentioned in particular the need for all to achieve sustainable patterns of consumption and production, with developed countries taking a leading role.
 - There was discussion on **how global goals can reinforce national actions**, while **respecting countries' different priorities and circumstances**.
 - It was noted that **global goals could empower national civil society and other actors**.
 - At the same time, there will be **need to allow flexibility to countries to adapt global goals and especially related targets to their needs**.
 - An option for doing so that garnered considerable interest was the **creation of a global dashboard of targets and indicators** under each goal from which countries could select those most appropriate and relevant. The common understanding is that targets on the global dashboard are to assist the implementation of global goals. **Both of them should be relying on coherent institutional framework**.
 - This would also allow **flexibility** for countries to take on more ambitious targets over time, should they make better than expected progress.

Scope of the SDGs

- The MDGs did not recognize the many dimensions of poverty, which go beyond monetary income.

- In building on the MDGs, many of you have said that the **gap the SDGs are meant to address is one of integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development, and implementation of integrated solutions.**
- **SDGs could serve three functions: norm or priority setting; coordinating global action; and measuring actions and outcomes at the national level.**
- **Three possible types of goals are:** (i) **human development related goals** with little environmental impact associated with their attainment (e.g., education); (ii) **human development related goals** with important environmental dimensions – e.g., water, food, energy; (iii) **goals related to common management of global resources.**
- Our task at hand is to **find not only a minimum threshold** for shared prosperity but to aim higher for **transformational change.**
- Many of you have emphasized that the goals and targets should **include all three dimensions of sustainable development and their complex interlinkages**, but some cautioned on over-engineering specific goals.
- Women and disadvantaged groups, indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities must be addressed through ambitious and measurable targets and indicators in all relevant goals.

Realizing and measuring SDGs: means of implementation and global partnerships

- We cannot set goals for ourselves without considering carefully **how we are to achieve them.**
- We will continue to discuss means of implementation and a renewed and strengthened partnership for sustainable development in the course of our work. We expect to dedicate time specifically for that discussion. **We will also keep close track of progress of discussions in the financing expert working group.**
- Many of you have expressed your views on the means of implementation in the past days. I heard many of you say that means of implementation and partnerships should usefully be considered in relation to each goal we set, while some cautioned that **just as goals and their achievement will be interrelated so will be the means of achieving them.**
- **The needs of countries in special situations** will need to be considered carefully in our discussion of means of implementation, and that is allowed for in our future work programme.
- **It is clear that we need new thinking on international cooperation beyond the traditional donor-recipient relationship.**
- We were reminded that **not all that is valuable can be measured**, but we also recognize the **importance of measurability as a lesson from the MDGs.** We

have to be able to say whether we are making real progress towards our goals. And we need to consider measures of **progress beyond GDP including those which capture well-being and happiness**.

- **But what should we measure?** One lesson many have taken from the MDGs is that we must not neglect **quality measures** that may better reflect genuine progress than mere quantity measures.
 - On education, for example, not just years of schooling or even schooling augmented by attendance rates, but completion and literacy rates must be accounted for.
 - On food security, not just a reduction in hunger, but access to quality nutritional food.
- **But this requires also a reality check**, asking on which measures we can reasonably expect **to collect reliable and timely data** in the large majority of countries.
- Many countries have capacity constraints in meeting data requirements of reporting. **Without reliable monitoring data, it is difficult to devise good policies**. We must be sure that if we expect countries to collect new types of data and adopt new indicators to measure progress on SDGs, **we start early on to build institutional capacities to do so**.
- **We will need to tap the best scientific knowledge**, including both natural and social sciences, to inform our work, including in the setting of sensible targets and the choice of indicators, but also in the monitoring and evaluation of progress.

Timeframes

- 15-year goals were unique for the MDGs, and unleashed new creativity to achieve longer-term goals. **We have had an interesting discussion the possibility of aiming for 30-year goal setting with the SDGs**, since the systemic and transformational changes we are talking about will require longer time horizons.
- While many agree on the idea of broadening the time frame, **you have also emphasized that we must somehow ensure that countries and governments accountable within shorter incremental periods**.
- Additionally, many of you recognized that long-term goals must be able to anticipate that our **rapidly changing world will present unexpected challenges and new developments**, both positive and negative. We must also **design the SDGs to accommodate an ever-increasing global population**.

Poverty eradication

- Many stressed that poverty eradication is not one issue among many in the SDGs; it is central to the OWG, it is at the core of the SDGs and it must be mainstreamed in all our work. As one group noted, the Rio+20 outcome sets a high level of ambition, calling for freeing humanity from hunger and poverty. Others spoke of the need to ensure the irreversible eradication of poverty.
- Importance of addressing *drivers of poverty eradication*: among those identified as critical were inclusive and robust economic growth, decent jobs and productive livelihoods; equitable access to basic goods and services, such as water, food, energy, health and education, social protection; and sustainable management of natural resources. Empowerment of women and gender equality as well as the access of poor people to justice were stressed as a critical driver.
- *Poverty goal:*
 - stand-alone, cross-cutting or both: We have had a rich discussion of how to craft a poverty goal or goals. Many have indicated that we need a clear stand-alone goal to eradicate poverty. Our further discussions will show what option to take.
 - multidimensional poverty: we heard clearly that poverty is multidimensional, going beyond income poverty. This needs to be recognized but how? Should we have a multidimensional indicator, or should we address poverty in relation to each of the other goals we set?
 - addressing inequality: many noted the close link between poverty and inequality – not only in terms of income but in access to education and assets, to vital services and to political voice. How can these be reflected in goals and in targets?
- Some speakers suggested that, in a framework that balances the three dimensions of sustainable development, we should view poverty eradication in relation to those dimensions – for example, in terms of access to essential social goods and services (health, education), access to economic opportunities and productive assets, and access to natural assets.
- **Near poverty and vulnerability:** Several speakers noted the risk to many people with incomes just above the poverty line of falling back into poverty as result of various shocks, not least from natural disasters and climate change.
- One speaker noted that ‘poverty of opportunity’ is not well addressed by either income poverty or MPI measure ... some countries have greater vulnerabilities and handicaps than others and the particular structural constraints they face need to be considered.

- ***Learning from what works*** – progress made in **a number of countries in substantially reducing poverty**. We need to learn more from those experiences to understand better what the most critical interventions are in efforts to eradicate poverty.

Process going forward

- **Convergence:** it was widely agreed that at the end of the day, when we come to 2015, we would like to have a single, coherent development agenda with poverty eradication and SDGs at the core.
- So, how do we get there from here? We clearly **need to track and communicate with the other processes underway to define the post-2015 development agenda**.
- We heard many of you **call for further technical support from UN technical support team**, and certainly that will be forthcoming to support future sessions with issues briefs, just as for this one.
- **We will also continue to reach out to the scientific community** to provide technical inputs as we focus in on how to set appropriate goals and especially how to handle targets and indicators.