

Concluding Remarks of Co-Chairs, OWG3

24 May 2013

Distinguished colleagues, Ladies and gentlemen,

We have come to the conclusion of three days of vibrant and fruitful discussions. On behalf of my co-chair and myself, let me thank all for your active participation and summarize some of the main messages we have heard in these past few days. A number of you have requested that we provide a one-page bullet point summary that aims to capture areas where there seems to be a similar message coming from many quarters. In response we will shortly circulate a summary.

I remind you all that we are not – I repeat, not yet in a negotiating mode. This bullet point summary is only meant as *aide memoire* to facilitate our work. If you strongly feel that key points – and I emphasize **key** points – are missed out or misrepresented in the bullets, we invite you to send the Secretariat your suggestions by e-mail within one week from today.

The participants almost unanimously expressed appreciation for the issues briefs of the UN Technical Support Team, and have even made specific suggestions for follow-on work, for example, to consider how best to address interlinkages among various themes and priorities.

Let me also say that each morning of the past three days we have had a very constructive conversation with Major Groups and other stakeholders, and many of the concerns and proposals raised there have been reiterated by Member States, which I think we should all find very encouraging.

The Secretariat will be producing a more detailed summary of the discussions for those of you who may find it useful, together with a running list of proposals we have heard for specific goals, targets and indicators in various areas. That list will be a living document.

- Let me repeat what my co-chair said at the beginning of these three days, that we need a common vision going forward. Allow me to recall how that vision was summarized last time:
 - transformative change for 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.

- Three points are noteworthy about that vision:
 - It is a human-centred vision with poverty eradication and human development at its centre.
 - Transformative change is needed; the SDGs must build on, but must deepen and go beyond the MDGs.
 - Why? because if we continue with business-as-usual, we may make short-term progress, but poverty eradication will not be *sustainable*.
 - To make sure that poverty eradication and human development are *irreversible*, we need the SDGs – we need goals that address the three dimensions of sustainable development in a balanced manner.
 - Many also stressed the importance of a rights-based approach to food, water and sanitation, as these are recognized as fundamental human rights.
- Let me turn to the clusters we have been considering these few days and summarize some of the key messages we have heard.

Food security and nutrition; sustainable agriculture; desertification, land degradation, and drought

- First, a few general observations before turning to each element of the cluster individually.
- What we heard in many interventions was that the Rio+20 outcome document already provides a useful roadmap for the way forward on food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture. But now the challenge is to hone down that rich text into a lean goal, or goals, with a few strategic targets.
 - What do I mean by a strategic target? I mean:
 - one that is a very good summary measure of broad progress in ensuring sustainable food security and nutrition,
 - one that can be achieved only through addressing structural cause of hunger and malnutrition, and ideally,
 - one whose achievement has benefits well beyond the immediate objective of eradicating hunger and malnutrition.
- Actually, we're not yet sure if we should have one, two or three goals covering these elements. Picking up on the point I made above about

sustainability, it seems likely that ensuring food security and adequate nutrition for all *on a sustainable basis*, i.e., *irreversibly*, will prove elusive if we don't shift to sustainable agricultural systems.

- And such systems would have as a core element an end to land degradation and would include even significant land restoration and soil nutrient replenishment, with benefits not only for food security but for biodiversity and ecosystems, sustainable water management, and climate change adaptation and mitigation, to name a few.
- Many speakers referred to the nexus among, or close interdependency of, several themes discussed, including food, land and water, as well as with others not yet discussed like energy, health, biodiversity and climate change.
 - While there was broad agreement that interlinkages among issues need to be considered, there is no agreement yet on how that might be done in the goals and targets. Some suggest clustering of issues, others cross-referential targets.
- We were also reminded that in considering food security and nutrition we need to include not just farmers but also pastoralists and fisher people in our discussions.

Food security and nutrition

- A food secure, poverty free world: that is what we're all striving for.
- We heard many of you say that both poverty eradication and an end to hunger and malnutrition are eminently attainable in a generation or less – some referred to 2020, and that these goals need to be front and centre in the SDGs.
 - Many countries referred favorably to the Secretary-General's zero hunger challenge that calls *inter alia* for universal access to adequate food year-round as well as zero stunted children under two years old.
 - In addition to stunting, some mentioned wasting and anemia as important measures of malnutrition.
 - Several governments and other stakeholders referred to the 1,000 day window from the beginning of pregnancy through the child's 2nd birthday when proper nutrition is critical to lifetime physical and mental development.
 - One proposed formulation of a food goal was: ensure access for everyone to safe, affordable, adequate, appropriate, nutritious food.

- Access and affordability are important aspects of food security that deserve attention. Increasing production will not on its own resolve the problem of hunger and malnutrition for those poor people who lack the means to access and acquire the food they need. Decent work and steady sources of income are critical in this regard, as are social protection programmes. The positive results of some countries' zero hunger programmes can provide valuable lessons.
- Many noted that there needs to be a focus not only on calorie intake but also on proper nutrition, including adequate micronutrient intake. Proper nutrition is also a major concern even of those who have adequate calories – as evidenced by the steep rise in obesity in many countries. There is a close link in turn to the rising disease burden from non-communicable diseases.

Sustainable agriculture

There was broad agreement on *what* is needed:

- Increased productivity and efficiency of resource use will be needed, especially in light of the growing food demand from a rising population and the changing patterns of demand with more prosperous populations.
- Without those improvements, pressures on land, water, forests and other natural resources will only become worse.

There was perhaps less agreement on the *how*.

- Some but not all consider that the agricultural model of the green revolution has outlived its usefulness and a new model based on more sustainable practices must replace it.
 - Such sustainable intensification would need to be based on a variety of techniques that are widely known but not all widely practiced – including conservation tillage, organic fertilizer, natural pest control, use and sharing of traditional as well as improved seed varieties, integrated soil, water and plant management, crop rotation and intercropping including with agro-forestry systems, to name a few.
 - One silver lining is that these techniques generally draw on public domain knowledge, including traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples and other farming and pastoralist communities, and knowledge sharing – especially farmer-to-farmer – is thus vital to their wide dissemination.

- Increased investments in agriculture, agricultural value chains including value addition processes, and rural infrastructure were widely cited as crucial to poverty eradication, food security and sustainable rural development.
- Smallholders, including importantly women farmers and indigenous peoples, were singled out as deserving particular focus when crafting agricultural policies, including policies to strengthen land tenure rights and facilitate access to agricultural credit. The SG's Zero Hunger Challenge, for example, calls for a doubling of smallholder productivity and income.
- Improved smallholder farmer access to and integration into national, regional and global agricultural markets was seen as a priority.
- It was noted that there is more than enough food for everyone but tremendous loss and waste that need to be combatted – the former through improved post-harvest handling and storage in developing countries, the latter mostly through changing consumption patterns in developed countries.
- Eliminating, or substantially reducing, loss and waste could greatly augment the available food supply, helping answer the question of how the world will feed another 2 billion people in coming decades without massive deforestation and further land degradation.
- Many raised concerns about climate change and how it would compromise food security in their countries. Stress was placed on the need for greater R&D into heat and drought resistant crops and other adaptive techniques, also for access to technologies of water conservation. In general, building more resilient food systems including possibly through a return to greater crop diversification will be needed.

International factors pertaining to food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture

- Many countries raised concerns about the financialization of commodity markets, including food commodities, and their contribution to recent price volatility.
 - There was a call to address the root causes of heightened price volatility, including through improved market information and oversight of commodity markets.
- There was also a strong call from many countries for urgent action to eliminate subsidies, particularly in developed countries.

- Some cautioned against the use of unwarranted trade restrictions under the banner of sustainable agriculture. The issue of ‘land grabbing’ was raised, reinforcing the need to strengthen land rights of indigenous peoples, pastoralists and smallholder farmers.
- Fisheries and their sustainable management were also mentioned by several in relation to food security, and some called for reform of fisheries subsidies contributing to overfishing.

Desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD)

- Land degradation is a serious concern to developing countries, particularly in Africa, but affects developed countries as well. A large proportion of the world’s poor live in drylands, and a significant proportion are pastoralists.
- Many stressed the need to address the drivers of land degradation, including unsustainable agricultural and livestock management practices, as well as pollution by unsustainable waste management, mining and industrial processes, with effects being further exacerbated by climate change.
- Unabated DLDD would undermine any goal or target to provide sustainable food security for all. It would also worsen biodiversity loss and climate change.
- Some success stories in restoration of degraded lands were described, notably in the Sahel region of Africa.
- There was a discussion of how to treat DLDD in the SDGs, whether as a stand-alone goal or as a target linked to food security or perhaps sustainable natural resource use and management.
- The Rio+20 outcome committed countries to work towards a land-degradation neutral world. Many countries reaffirmed that commitment.
 - Still, questions were raised about what the notion of neutrality implies, if it implies that degradation in one place can be offset by equivalent restoration elsewhere. This offset approach was questioned because of the highly localized costs and impacts of DLDD that such offsets would not address.
 - It was suggested that efforts to combat DLDD could be translated into a goal and targets perhaps along the following lines:
 - Goal: sustainable land use for all
 - Targets:
 - zero net land degradation by 2030
 - zero net forest degradation by 2030

- drought preparedness measures in place by 2020.
- There was strong support from many countries for enhancing the financial resources of the UNCCD, and also a call for enhancing knowledge and data on DLDD including possibly through a scientific panel.
- Research is ongoing under the UNCCD into the costs and benefits of measures to slow and reverse land degradation. It was noted that preliminary indications are that the capital investments required are often modest and that they should be considered investments in an underperforming asset of the poor that can yield high returns.

Water and sanitation

- Water is at the core of sustainable development. Water and sanitation are central to the achievement of many development goals. Universal access would greatly reduce the burden of disease in many developing countries, having especially salutary effects in reducing child mortality.
- Water resources also play a vital role in economic growth and poverty eradication.
- Addressing water effectively must encompass access, water quantity and quality, improved governance frameworks, infrastructure and technology, and water efficiency.
- The progress in achieving the safe drinking water target of MDG7 was noted, as was the fact that progress towards the sanitation target has lagged far behind.
- There was broad support for the approach taken to a water goal reflected in the Technical Support Team's Issue Brief.
- Many reiterated the need to work together towards progressive realization of universal coverage of safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene in an ambitious timeframe.
- Globally the water and sanitation challenge remains greatest in rural areas, but in coming decades we expect rapid growth of cities and of associated demands for urban water supply and sanitation as well as other basic infrastructure in developing countries.
- There was an interesting discussion on the pros and cons of a stand-alone SDG on sanitation. While the jury is still out, it was noted that what matters most is that sanitation is given political priority in national plans.
- However an overarching water and sanitation goal is formulated, most agreed that it could have targets addressing the three dimensions of sustainable development:

- equitable and universal access to safe water and sanitation, with a focus on the poor and disadvantaged and also with special consideration of the sanitation and female hygiene needs;
- efficient management and use of water resources, including at water basin level;
- all used water and wastewater to be treated before returning to nature or re-used in agricultural or other production.
- Several referred to the particular challenge of sustainably managing groundwater resources in the face of high depletion rates and pollution threats from multiple sources. Concerns were also raised over cumulative pollution of water sources, for instance from heavy metals, and of irreversible depletion of fossil water stocks for example in aquifers.
- Many stressed the importance of access to appropriate technologies for water-use efficiency as well as for water treatment, recycling and re-use. Investment will be needed and financing will have to be mobilized, though some pointed to low-cost solutions to sewage and other wastewater treatment.
- It was noted, with respect to the MDG7 target on sanitation, that it neglected the importance of public sanitation facilities – for instance in schools and hospitals. We should see how this could be remedied in the SDGs, given the link between school facilities, female school attendance and women’s health.
- On water resources management, many referred to the importance of addressing in the SDGs natural disaster preparedness in general and in particular, water-related disasters, including from droughts and flooding.
- The close interrelationship was noted between conservation and sustainable management of watersheds, wetlands and other water-related ecosystems on the one hand and both water quality and quantity regulation and mitigation of natural disasters.

With that, I conclude our summary of our discussions. Clearly we could not capture each and every valuable point made, but I hope you will find most here.

I thank you for your attention, and we will make this co-chairs’ summary available shortly on the website.

We will also now circulate the page of bullet points we promised. We hope you find them useful to our work.