

Input from the United Arab Emirates in response to the UN Task Team questionnaire on to the development of Sustainable Development Goals

- 1. Please list a limited number, preferably between five and ten, of the important priority areas that must be addressed through the SDGs to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.**

In a concept note on Sustainable Development Goals presented by the governments of the United Arab Emirates, Colombia, and Peru in preparation for Rio+20, an indicative list of priority areas to be address through the SDGs were identified. These issues were considered to be politically mature and to address widely acknowledged needs, and include, inter alia:

- **Access to sustainable, secure and adequate nutrition for all:** sustainable production, access, and nutrition, including reduced waste and improved efficiency and distribution
- **Integrated water management for sustainable growth:** sustainable access to quality water resources and sanitation including resilience of the hydrological cycle and related ecosystems
- **Energy for sustainable development:** access for all, improved energy efficiency, and an increase in the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix
- **Enhanced employment and livelihood security**
- **Enhanced capacity of natural systems to support human welfare**
- **Improved efficiency and sustainability in resource use**
- **Healthy and productive oceans**
- **Sustainable and resilient cities and urban systems**

These priority areas should be considered alongside the continued implementation, consideration, etc. of the existing MDG categories¹, and either their continued pursuit or their evolution, depending on where achievement of the existing MDGs stand, and linkages between evolving SDGs and the existing MDGs.

¹ Ending poverty and hunger, universal education, gender equality, child health, maternal health, combatting HIV/AIDs, environmental sustainability and the global partnership.

The UAE does not see that the full list of topics presented in Section V of the Rio outcome document need be considered as SDGs, although some of the issues identified in the Rio outcome will certainly serve as the basis for potential SDGs going forward. Of course the final SDGs will need to be agreed by the open working group once it is constituted, but we believe the above list represents a good first place to start.

- 2. How might the SDGs strive to balance the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development?**
 - a. Reflect social, economic and environmental dimensions within each SDG, possibly through associated targets**
 - b. Integrate the MDGs, suitably modified/updated for post-2015, into a larger sustainable development framework**
 - c. Expand MDG7 ('environmental sustainability') into a number of goals with a natural/environmental resource dimension (water, food, energy, etc.)**
 - d. Other (please describe)**

There are a number of ways in which the SDGs might strive to balance the economic, social, and environmental pillars of sustainable development. Amongst the choices provided, the SDGs might usefully (a) reflect social, economic and environmental dimensions within each SDG, possibly through associated targets, although the final answer will depend on how the process evolves, particularly with respect to the MDGs and their continuation/evolution.

In addition to reflecting the three dimensions within each SDG, it might also be important to consider whether there is a balance between the priority areas the SDGs represent, across the economic, social, and environmental pillars of sustainable development.

The post-2015 framework and any SDGs elaborated will of course sit within a larger sustainable development framework. However, it may not be sufficient to balance the three pillars of sustainable development in a set of SDGs simply by situating them within a broader sustainable development framework. This approach may also risk over-broadening and overloading the post-2015 development agenda, undermining the specific nature of the MDGs which helped to make them useful.

Expanding the existing MDG7 on environmental sustainability is also not likely sufficient to ensure that a future set of SDGs balance the three pillars of sustainable development. Not only are the MDG7 Targets generally vague and difficult to monitor, they fail to represent the full suite of environmental sustainability issues facing the world today (e.g. as related to climate change, oceans, etc.). In addition, overhauling the sustainable development MDG in an attempt to balance the 3 pillars of sustainable development misses the point that all goals need to be multi-

dimensional, and that they will need to combine the 3 pillars of sustainable development in an integrated manner to truly ensure that a lasting solution to poverty and development is truly sustainable.

- 3. Based on your experience with MDGs or other existing goals, what would be the key use of SDGs for your country (select at most two)?**
- a. Defining national policies**
 - b. Influencing national budget allocations**
 - c. Reviewing the impact of national policies**
 - d. Addressing key pressure leading to unsustainability**
 - e. Helping to balance economic, social and environmental pillars in policy making**
 - f. Guiding development cooperation**
 - g. Other (please explain)**

Please explain your choices if you would like:

Amongst the choices provided, the answers that most accurately represent the UAE's experience with MDGs and other existing goals are (e) helping to balance economic, social and environmental pillars in policy making, and (f) guiding development cooperation.

The UAE is a major provider of official development assistance, with a diverse range of organizations committed to supporting the sustainable development ambitions of developing countries. These include, among others, Dubai Cares and the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development (ADFD).

Much of the assistance provided by the UAE has been guided by the existing MDGs. Through this experience we have seen that the MDGs, despite some shortcomings, have played an important and helpful role in defining development priorities towards 2015. We see the SDGs as a potentially useful complement to the MDGs, to fill gaps, and to better address the interlinkages between the three pillars of sustainable development.

The UAE has also done significant work to monitor, track, analyze and assess the assistance we provide. Recognizing the importance of monitoring and analyzing our foreign aid, in 2008, the UAE established the Office for the Coordination of Foreign Aid (OCFA). OCFA's key objectives include documenting foreign aid provided by the UAE-based organizations, building capacity within UAE donor organizations, and helping donors improve delivery of humanitarian and development programs worldwide.

Through OCFA, the UAE is currently the only non-OECD country to report on our foreign aid according to DAC guidelines, including against the MDGs and the Rio markers. OCFA's active tracking efforts of these types of support could be useful in informing the SDG development process.

At a domestic level, our country has developed rapidly over the last few decades. Recognizing the sustainability-related risks and opportunities of this rapid development, the UAE has tried to take a proactive approach, including a focus on developing clean energy, diversifying our economy, elaborating a national plan for green growth, empowering women and investing in education and health. We believe there are lessons learned to share from the achievements and setbacks we have experienced as elaboration of the SDGs is explored.

4. How can “universally applicable” SDGs be made practically relevant for countries at different levels of development? (Please refer to your country’s situation as appropriate.)

Like the MDGs, the SDGs can be “universally applicable” by comprising global targets, representing an overall vision and global agenda for sustainable development and poverty eradication. These global targets can underpin accelerated progress against the priority areas the SDGs represent.

At the same time, “universally applicable” goals do not imply a “one size fits all” approach. As with the MDGs, SDGs can be pursued by all countries in different ways, and according to different policies and approaches. Furthermore, each country does not necessarily need to achieve a particular SDG at a national level in order for the global target to be attained.

“Universally applicable” SDGs can take into consideration a country’s level of development, such that a country’s contribution to the achievement of a given SDG is undertaken according and appropriate to their initial conditions, national circumstances, abilities, present and anticipated demographic structures and shifts, etc.

Looking at the UAE’s situation and the MDGs as an example, the UAE has made significant progress on achieving many of the MDGs domestically, in particular on universal education (approaching 100%), high ratios of women in primary and secondary education (women represent 61% of students in higher education), reduced child mortality and improved maternal health, etc.

Prioritization amongst and between SDGs may also be driven by a country’s national circumstances, initial conditions, and priorities.

In addition, financial, technical and capacity building support will be required for meeting the SDGs in some countries.

Finally, some dimension of given SDGs might be “universally applicable” in that they could apply to the international community collectively and be accelerated through multilateral partnerships. “Universal applicability” might also be achieved through

goals that extend beyond governments, and involve civil society, international organizations, the private sector, etc.

- 5. The SDGs are supposed to be “global in nature.” Should targets associated with those goals be:**
- a. Common to all countries?**
 - b. Defined by each country? Or**
 - c. Common but differentiated depending on country characteristics and level of development? If c., please explain how.**

The SDGs are supposed to be “global in nature” and targets associated with those goals should be (c) common but differentiated, depending on country characteristics, levels of development, etc.

As already elaborated above, a particular country’s approach to pursuing achievement of the SDGs may be driven by that country’s national circumstances, initial conditions, and priorities.

At the same time, countries may benefit from engaging multilaterally and sharing thoughts, approaches and lessons learned as they look to elaborate targets associated with a given SDG. By sharing this information and facilitating better understanding of national circumstances and priorities, countries might also help identify financial, technical and capacity building support needs, particularly in developing countries, as well as opportunities for collaboration. This in turn can help ensure the global achievement of the goals, while still allowing for differentiated targets depending on country circumstances.

Establishing a multilateral partnership around each SDG for voluntary collaboration and information sharing may be helpful in this regard.

- 6. Which existing goals and targets (e.g., MDGs, goals/targets in Agenda 21, JPOI) do you think *should* be incorporated—perhaps in updated form—in a proposal for sustainable development goals?**

As agreed in the Rio+20 outcome document, the SDGs should build upon and be guided by Agenda 21, the Rio Principles, and the JPOI. They should also address the gaps in existing goals and targets that have hindered the implementation of sustainable development and the integration of its principles to date.

At the same time, SDGs should not simply restate existing goals, especially goals that have gone unrealized because of inherent shortcomings in their framing, e.g. because they are not concise, action-oriented, , time-limited, achievable, easy to communicate, limited in number, etc. In part the success of the MDGs has been the

result of just this sort of focus and specificity. This is a positive aspect of the MDGs that the SDGs should build upon.

7. What specific steps can be taken to ensure that the SDGs are coherent with and integrated into the UN development agenda beyond 2015?

The Rio+20 Outcome Document outlines a clear process that ensures the SDGs are coherent with and integrated into the UN development agenda beyond 2015. Steps to ensure coherence and integration are already underway, as demonstrated by the work of the Task Team to provide the support requested in paragraph 249 of the Rio+20 decision document.

The timing of the various work streams dealing with the SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda will be important to further ensuring coherence. The open working group on SDGs must be established and its work started without delay to sure that there is sufficient time for that group's recommendations to feed into the post-2015 process.

In addition, integration across the processes as they are ongoing will be important. To the extent possible, the open working group, high level panel, and other work streams, should be encouraged to have regard to one another. For example, meetings could be scheduled between those leading and participating in the various processes to ensure overall complementarity and coherence. As another example, membership, experts, and/or Secretariat support could be partially or wholly shared between them.

Finally, executing the work of the various groups and panels in distinct phases would allow for consideration of areas of convergence and divergence at given milestones before each is complete. This will enable consideration of gaps that might need to be addressed by one process or another, and further ensure integration and coherence between the various processes.

The Sustainable Development Solutions Network also has a role to play in ensuring this integration and coherence.

8. How should assessments of progress toward the achievement of the SDGs be carried out at a global level?

Overall assessment of progress towards the achievement of SDGs at the global level can be undertaken by drawing upon and synthesizing elements of progress by a variety of national reports as well as those produced by international institutions. Assessments should be designed to promote sharing of information and lessons-

learned. They are not a tool for assessing the adequacy of national policies, approaches, circumstances, etc.

9. What measures should be taken to make the process of developing a proposal for SDGs inclusive and participatory? How should civil society and other relevant stakeholders be engaged?

Paragraph 248 of the Rio+20 Outcome Document outlines a clear, inclusive and participatory process for elaborating the SDGs through the open working group that is open to all stakeholders. As already noted, the open working group on SDGs must be established and its work started without delay to ensure the greatest opportunity for stakeholder engagement and input.

To further ensure that the process for developing an SDGs proposal is inclusive and participatory, expert panels as mentioned in paragraph 249 of the Rio+20 Outcome Document should be constituted, allowing broad participation of national experts, including representatives from Member States, UN agencies, academia, think tanks, CSOs, NGO, etc.

The Sustainable Development Solutions Network also has a role to play in making this process inclusive and participatory.

10. What principles should underpin the development of the SDGs? (the UN TT report, for example, recommended adding (i) reducing inequalities and (ii) promoting human rights (iii) ensuring sustainability);

The development of the SDGs should be underpinned by the principles of the Millennium Declaration, as well as the principles represented in Agenda 21, the Rio Principles, and the JPOI.

11. How should a new Global Partnership for Development be constructed within or around the SDGs?

As noted above, a multilateral partnership around each SDG for voluntary collaboration and information sharing may be helpful in this regard. We might look to build upon existing resources such as the Sustainable Development Solutions Network and the Rio+20 Compendium of Commitments. A new Global Partnership for Development might also look at cross-cutting issues, to see how approaches and solutions applied with one SDG might shine light on a solution relevant to another target's achievement.

12. Do you have any other observations, ideas or inputs you would like to offer to inform the initial work of the open working group on sustainable development goals?

N/A.