

Business and Industry input to the Second Committee event "Conceptualizing a Set of Sustainable Development Goals".

October 16, 2012

How can the SDGs build on the MDGs and integrate sustainable development into the post-2015 development framework?

- The MDGs have mobilized minds and catalyzed action to combat poverty. They highlight priorities for the neediest and most vulnerable and have been a very useful first step.
- There has been a valuable learning process and this experience needs to be built on and not to be lost as we review the post 2015 objectives and devise SDGs.
- Rio+20 highlighted how necessary the engagement of ALL countries and ALL stakeholders will be. The SDGs are an opportunity to bring "sustainability" and "development" together in a mutually reinforcing and measurable way, and 1) animate global cooperation and 2) draw on and mobilize the resources of non-governmental constituencies and the Major Groups, notably business.
- Business worked actively and constructively in the run-up to Rio, in the MDGs and in the Monterrey/Istanbul/Busan discussions, so we are well placed to make the connections that this effort will require. We see strong potential for the SDGs to be more than the sum of their parts and the convergence of the MDGs and SDGs into a single coherent post 2015 development framework to be an important consideration.
- The objective at the "centre" of each SDG needs to be well defined. It must be a "fundamental" that underpins all three dimensions of sustainable development and be viewed from both "sustainability" and "development" standpoints.
- The "fundamentals" that need to be given a primary focus are those on which everything else depends. They are air, water, land, energy, food and managing wastes. While each has specific constraints, they are all interrelated and together enable vital development issues such as public health, education, biodiversity, national security, economic activity, employment and so forth to occur. If progress is being made on these "fundamentals" of sustainable development, the aspects of poverty alleviation and quality of life will progress as a consequence, but if effort is prioritized on secondary level issues the long-term outcome will be unsatisfactory. For example, starting with public health or education without the getting the fundamentals of water, energy, and food right first will not give the results that are hoped for.
- Enabling conditions for sustainability will need to be front and center, building on a foundation of economic growth, improved quality of life, good governance and strong institutions. We must set priorities or else risk spreading the efforts and resources "too thinly."
- The measures required to assess progress must be thought out now and the means to monitor and report on results must be devised. Where possible and appropriate, these should be built on processes put in place for the MDGs and incorporate the lessons the MDGs have taught us, including the importance of establishing baselines, against which to measure progress.

- Finally, the development of the SDGs should consider how to mobilize and channel resources most cost-effectively – for business, stepping up investment in and deployment of financial and technological resources and knowhow will be one of the most critical success factors for SDGs that are not unmet promises.

How can the SDGs integrate the three dimensions (social, economic and environmental) of sustainable development?

- As indicated above, the fundamentals are all interrelated and link all three dimensions of sustainable development.
- Take water and the Rio objective that used water should be collected and de-polluted. It is obvious that this activity will protect the environment. It is equally obvious that it will protect human health and well-being and by doing this it will certainly contribute to the economic dimensions of sustainable development.
- A strong focus on these fundamentals, the linkages between them and the next level priorities will be a key to success. If a candidate topic for a SDG does not encompass all three dimensions of sustainable development, it should not be retained.
- Each goal should have a limited number of targets (probably 3) and these should be selected to support the overarching goal and also should encompass all three dimensions of sustainable development.
- For business, it will be indispensable to reflect economic circumstances, opportunities and risks in designing the goals and targets as well as their necessary “support structure.” Bringing non-governmental and business more substantively into the framing of the SDGs will go a long way to building a more holistic and pragmatic and operational approach.

How to develop universally applicable goals that at the same time take into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development?

- The experience of the MDGs has taught us quite clearly that processes of top-down and bottom-up have to meet for future SDGs to be successful. A high-level vision and commitment at a global level that gives clear direction and hope is an essential dimension. While global goals and targets are extremely important, the SDGs should not specify “how” countries would meet them, but leave it up to each country to define how it enacts its own actions, either individually or in partnership with others.
- Different countries have different starting points, different means, different natural resources and different objectives. Moreover, they are facing and coping with dynamic and ever changing circumstances – one need only reflect on the state of the world 20 years ago compared to today to understand how necessary building flexibility and evolution into the SDGs will be – both to adapt to such unanticipated changes, but also to spark and inspire innovation in policies and practices.
- The SDGs need to provide a clear framework within which each country can make its own choices, plans and commitments in the context of an overall shared goal.
- A strategic planning framework that helps each country contextualize the suite of SDGs as a whole for its own jurisdiction and citizens would help allocate priorities, resources and effort and provide a basis for communications.
- Such a strategic planning framework would also help countries relate their own programmes with the overall global programme of a set of sustainable development goals.

- The processes put in place to measure and monitor progress and to compile global statistics need to be devised in ways that show each country that these processes are clearly designed to assist and benefit them.
- For business, in addition to government actions, markets must be enlisted and partnerships encouraged to instigate the necessary diversity and scale of actions. Business understands this synergy (and sometimes tension) well, in light of multiple markets and countries where it operates, while seeking to maintain good standards of sound management and practice throughout.