

New Zealand Permanent Mission to the United Nations



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SECOND MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Conceptualising the SDGs

Intervention by Juliet Hay, Counsellor

18 April 2013

Thank you for the background material provided in advance of this meeting and also for the panel discussion yesterday which provided more food for thought for this discussion about conceptualising the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

In March we gave an overview of New Zealand's thinking to date on the SDGs –essentially that:

- the guidance given in the Rio+20 document should be the starting point;
- we should build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) but take a holistic approach that integrates the three dimensions of sustainable development from the outset; and
- we should aim for goals that reflect the highest common ambition.

We mentioned the need for convergence of this process and post-2015 development agenda. Yesterday Professor Fukuda-Parr said that goals alone are not enough –that goals do not set agendas and we need a narrative as well. New Zealand would see that evolving in our discussions here and in the broader post-2015 process. Increasingly, we see the end result being a broad overarching development agenda with a single set of goals.

While we should build on the successes of the MDGs there are also lessons to be learnt. There were a number of gaps, for instance in relation to inclusive economic growth. As the background paper notes, there are different views on whether particular features of the MDGs were or were not positive. The Group need to think more about which of those features should be retained.

Many areas are being proposed for potential SDGs. Our focus now should be on areas that are priorities for global action at this time. As Claire Melamed, one of yesterday's panellists, said we need to ask ourselves - What are most important things for the world tackle together?

For New Zealand these would include sustainable energy, oceans, and agriculture. Focusing on a small number of priority areas now does not mean that there cannot be more SDGs in the

future. At the same time we are also open to exploring Singapore's idea of clustering issues that are closely linked. But even if there is no clustering the Group will need to look at the SDGs as a whole as there will be linkages.

One of the successes of the MDGs was that framing the goals in simple terms meant it became a global brand. The SDGs should use a broadly similar format. We had discussion yesterday about the drawbacks of "simple" goals –that they end up being too simplistic. One thing that has changed from 2000 is social media –it is much easier than a decade ago to reach people at the grassroots and that is where support needs to be built if there are to be durable results. We said in March that perhaps with the goals themselves we should aim for something short enough to be "tweet-able". That would mean something high level but then, as with the MDGs, the goals would be supplemented by practical measurable targets and indicators. This is where the detail will be and where the Group has to work out what having "global" goals means in practice, and also how to integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Yesterday's discussion also highlighted that the MDG targets and indicators are not entirely consistent. During these first months of the Group's work we need come to common understandings about what the purpose of SDG "targets" and "indicators" should be and the differences between them. This will help when we come to drafting. Norway mentioned having "smart" targets which reminded us of the sort of performance objectives we have in our Ministry. These aim to be specific, measurable, appropriate to context (realistic), results focused, and time-bound. There are no doubt other possible approaches. The Group will also need to take into consideration what can be measured, and what sort of data collection is required. This will need some expert input.

The fact that these are global goals does mean that a different approach is needed from the MDGs. For example, New Zealand's evolving thinking is that while we should have global goals we might need targets that are customised to regional and national contexts, allowing countries to set their own national development goals while still linking them to the global ones. We have also seen Colombia's dashboard or menu of targets that states can sign up to voluntarily –that idea warrants further exploration. Perhaps after articulating the goals in broad terms, the targets are where the Group should spend its time.

We have heard suggestions that there might need to be separate goals or targets for each dimension of sustainable development. This would seem to be the opposite of integration and what was decided at Rio. At the same time integration does not need to be a straitjacket –there does not have to be an equal number of targets from each dimension for each goal. That would be artificial as there will be differences. What we need to do is look at each potential goal in a holistic way. For example, oceans are seen as primarily an environmental issue but there are also food security and livelihoods aspects which fall under other dimensions. New Zealand supports the comments yesterday that the approach to the crosscutting issues such as gender will evolve over time. We would, for instance, see a need for specific gender-related targets or indicators in relation to agriculture and health. The discussion on poverty eradication later today will also take us forward on that multidimensional issue. We do, however, take Japan's point that we should not end up with simple goals but a very long list of targets and indicators.

The Group will need to address means of implementation issues. We have heard suggestions that each goal must include its source of funds and accountability mechanism, that different partnerships will be needed for different goals, and that capacity building is needed. Having this addressed in each goal would be a new approach and was originally attempted in the Rio negotiations. It would require further thought and also input from the Sustainable Development Financing Working Group.

All these issues will require further reflection over coming months. We encourage flexibility and innovation.