

Concluding Remarks of Co-Chairs, OWG4 19 June 2013

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

- We have had a very rich discussion the past 3 days on some of the most important topics in sustainable development: jobs, social protection, education and culture, youth; health and population dynamics.
- Some of these are addressed in the MDGs, and the MDG experience has provided us with valuable lessons. A few of these are:
 - Equitable access to education and health services remains a challenge, and redoubled efforts will be needed to reach disadvantaged and excluded groups.
 - Access is not enough. Quality must also be addressed – in education, but also in health and jobs, e.g., in the form of decent work.
- We were reminded of the universality of the post-2015 agenda and the SDGs. Access to quality education, health care, social protection, decent work – these are universal aspirations of all countries and all peoples.
- We also heard that the post-2015 development agenda, including the SDGs, has the potential to be a turning point for achieving an aspirational, transformative global development agenda.
- Poverty eradication remains our overriding goal and is manifestly linked to decent and productive work, social protection, and access to quality basic education and health care.
- We were all challenged to think hard about our priorities, and were asked to consider each time we propose a goal or target: what will it take to achieve? How will the resources be mobilized?
- We have heard many proposals for goals and targets in the thematic areas, some for stand-alone goals, others for cross-cutting targets, often for both.
- What is clear is that the issues are closely interlinked and we must think hard how we'll address those interlinkages in our proposal on SDGs. We appreciate the initial thinking that Colombia and Guatemala have done in this regard with the dashboard proposal.
- How will we address the key drivers and enablers of change? In some cases they might be reflected in targets, while in others they might need to figure prominently in the accompanying narrative. Not all our priorities are “goalable”, just as not all are “globable” – i.e., priorities for all countries and for the international community.

- On measuring progress: We were reminded of the need to think even now about how to build data and statistical capacities, and make use of new information technologies to help us.
 - There was much emphasis on the need for disaggregated data so as to be able to track progress in *reaching vulnerable populations* and *addressing inequalities*; also the need for outcome-focused data if for example we want to measure not just schooling but *learning* for different social groups.
 - An idea: we could ask the TST, with the help of the UN Statistical Commission, to conduct a stocktaking of data availability, including disaggregated data, and measurement issues, including outcome-focused measures, in the thematic areas discussed in our Group.

Coming to the themes:

Employment and decent work

- Access to decent and productive work was widely noted as the most direct route out of poverty. This includes productive agricultural and rural employment as well as good factory and urban service jobs.
- Strong economic growth is necessary for robust employment growth but it is not sufficient. Growth must be inclusive, job-creating growth. Many of you referred to the role of industrialization in this regard. [This is the subject of our next OWG session.]
- Without economic dynamism, developing countries will find it very difficult to tap the full potential of their large youth populations.
- Yet, unemployment is a serious problem in many countries, including developed countries; youth unemployment is higher than the overall average; and the long-term unemployed are a growing share, which threatens social cohesion and erodes human capital.
- At the same time, in developing countries and especially the least developed countries, many of the poor are working poor, often in the informal sector, struggling to feed their families but not earning a living wage.
- Any goal or target related to jobs would need to address the situation of the working poor as well as the unemployed, and recognize that decent, productive jobs, complemented by social protection, are central to reaching the overarching goal of eradicating poverty.

- Access to career opportunities must be equal for all without discrimination – women and men; people with disabilities, with HIV/AIDS; people of all social, ethnic and religious groups.
- Workers’ rights, equal pay for women – these are crucial to addressing the widening gap between wages and productivity in many occupations and growing income inequality. Unions can foster social dialogue.
- Enterprises and entrepreneurs are the principal job creators, and conditions and policies to foster enterprise formation, growth and job creation are crucial to a successful jobs strategy, including access to credit, technology and markets by small and medium sized enterprises.
- Several referred to the potential to create quality green jobs through structural change towards sustainable development, acknowledging that structural change can also destroy some jobs. Hence, the reference we heard to a just transition.

Social protection

- Participants underlined that minimum thresholds are critical – of income, access to health care and basic services. Many highlighted the cross-cutting nature of social protection.
 - Social protection addresses not just symptoms of poverty but its causes.
 - It is also crucial to ensuring people do not fall back into poverty because of ill-health, old age, loss of a parent, or other life events.
- Social protection is critical for building social cohesion and addressing inequalities. Providing social protection for children is a determinant of lifelong opportunities and well-being.
- How to finance social protection? Mostly it will depend on domestic income growth, but it was noted that basic social protection does not need to await prosperity. Levels and kinds of social protection will evolve with development.
- There was some discussion of innovative sources of finance that could be mobilized to support social protection programs.

Education and culture

- We heard several terms repeated in relation to education: human right, equity of access, quality, and relevance. Let me mention each.

- We were reminded that education is a basic *human right* enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At the elementary level it should be not just affordable but free.
- Unequal *access* to quality basic education is a major determinant of inequalities in lifetime opportunities. Equitable access must be addressed in any goal on education. We cannot compromise on providing universal access to basic education, and several of you suggested we must think about going beyond primary education in defining a new goal.
- Too many children are not being well-served by schooling. Yes, we must finish the unfinished work of the MDGs to ensure universal primary school enrollment, but we must also give much more attention to *learning outcomes* in terms of literacy and numeracy. Raising adult literacy rates also remains a critical need in many countries.
- Several noted the need to expand the reach of quality education in rural and especially remote areas, to be able to reach underserved populations.
- *Relevance* to job needs: for most people, getting a quality education is first and foremost about qualifying for a good job.
 - That means learning the right things, which could include science and mathematics, entrepreneurship, vocational skills.
 - The many educated unemployed and underemployed are a serious waste of precious investment.
- Beyond job preparation, many stressed education's role in encouraging tolerance, active citizenship, and the deep thinking about the future that we need to make the transformative shifts required for sustainable development.
- Many stressed the importance of fostering *early childhood learning* to lay a firm foundation for formal schooling and lifelong learning.
- Investing in *education of girls* has huge potential benefits for the families of the individuals concerned as well as for the broader society and economy. But barriers to female formal employment need to be removed if women are to be able to realize that potential.
- *Financing*: One speaker stressed the importance of setting targets on financing – both domestic and international – to accompany an education goal.
- *Culture*: many mentioned culture's role as an enabler of sustainable development – by shaping society's values and attitudes; a holistic education can shape societal values that are supportive of sustainable development. Yet, it is not clear whether culture is “goalable” or, given cultural diversity, “globable”.

- Cultural diversity is a source of resilience, strengthen and adaptability of human societies. Intercultural dialogue and learning can contribute to mutual tolerance and peace, as well as innovation and dynamism.

Youth

- We have heard the voices of youth raised over the past three days. We must continue to listen to young people as we craft our proposal for SDGs.
- I was intrigued by the call from youth for an intergenerational partnership. At Rio we promised to explore further what we could do to enhance intergenerational solidarity, particularly with future generations in mind. We need to explore this further and look forward to youth's ideas.
- In an important sense, the future is *now*. The young people of today – the 20-somethings – will only be in their 50s at mid-century. What we decide in the coming few years will condition the sort of world they will inherit – and whether that world remains hospitable to human life and well-being, especially for the most vulnerable countries and populations.
- It was stated that youth are the world's greatest asset; they are innovators and problem solvers, and their potential needs to be fostered.
- Education and employment opportunities are the two keys to unlock that potential. Young people need to have opportunities – whether through formal or non-formal education – to develop the knowledge and skills they will need for productive employment.
- Youth concerns need to be reflected across other SDGs, particularly those that address education, health and employment.

Health

- Messages we heard: Health is a right and a goal in its own right as well as a means of measuring success across the whole sustainable development agenda.
- We have made encouraging progress with the three health goals under the MDGs, and we must ensure that this progress continues.
- Looking ahead, some suggest that the health MDGs could usefully be integrated as targets under an overarching universal health goal, possibly with health-related targets/indicators under other goals.
- Health is socially determined: poverty is a major cause of poor health and a main factor in child and maternal mortality. Thus, ending poverty is good for people's health. Environment, diet and lifestyle are also major determinants of health – and in some cases these too may be strongly

linked to poverty, as with exposure to indoor air pollution and diarrheal diseases from unsafe drinking water and poor sanitation.

- One goal proposed: maximize healthy lives. Another: universal health coverage for all citizens at every stage of life. This involves equitable access to quality basic health services; health promotion, prevention, treatment, and financial risk protection.
- Many of you emphasized the importance of prevention, with a focus on primary health care. It was suggested that targets should focus societies' efforts on preventing the causes of disease.
- It was noted that universal health coverage will mean different things for countries at different levels of income.
- Integrated approaches are needed to make health systems more efficient, accountable, and effective -- including by addressing serious shortages of qualified health workers where they exist as well as inadequate infrastructure to facilitate access to health care facilities.
- Communicable diseases remain a burden in many countries, and the progress on eradicating them must continue. Progress must continue on lowering child and maternal mortality.
- At the same time, non-communicable diseases have moved farther up the global health agenda, particularly with changing diets and lifestyles.
- Many stressed the need to address access and health needs of persons with disabilities.
- The discussions highlighted the importance of equal access of women and girls to health-care services, including addressing women's sexual and reproductive health, and ensuring universal access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable modern methods of family planning.
- Ageing populations pose a major health care challenge in high- and some middle-income countries.

Population dynamics

- There are very different demographic challenges facing different parts of the world. But demographics is not destiny.
- Many developing countries still have growing youth populations, offering the opportunity of reaping a demographic dividend, but for this to happen we will need complementary policies to foster economic dynamism and job creation.
- Most developed countries and some middle income countries have shrinking youth populations and expanding elderly populations that require health care and income support.

- There is therefore no “one size fits all” prescription for addressing population dynamics.
 - We learned that within the next several years the number of people over 65 is projected to overtake the number of children under 5 years globally.
 - But we also heard that the old and young face some of the same basic health risks – including death from diarrhea and pneumonia. So, to a degree, there is a common health agenda.
- A number of you mentioned migration as an important aspect of population dynamics, one which can bring development benefits for both senders and receivers as well as challenges, including the loss of skilled labor and social integration of migrants. As you emphasized, it is essential to respect the human rights of migrants and migrant workers.

Final note

- We are almost mid-way through our stocktaking exercise, and we have turned over a lot of rich ground.
- Although work will continue in other fora, the OWG will be pausing in our work for a few months, and during that time it would be good to reflect on how best to begin to bring all we’ve heard and shared into a coherent set of ambitious yet practical goals and targets.
- In coming weeks, we the co-chairs will be preparing a short report of our Group’s collective work, as an input to the High-level Event on MDGs in September.
- In the fall and winter we will have a heavy agenda, with several week-long sessions covering such weighty subjects as sustained and inclusive economic growth, macroeconomics, governance, and means of implementation.
- We will also be considering a number of topics that relate to our cooperative management of the global commons – including biodiversity, oceans, climate change and sustainable consumption and production.
- We still have a lot of hard work ahead to round off the stocktaking phase of our work before we turn to crafting our SDGs proposal.
- The bulleted summary and these concluding remarks will be posted on the OWG website.
- A more extended summary of our discussions will be posted soon.
- Thanks to all of you for your active engagement in our work, Member States, Major Groups and other stakeholders, and speakers alike.
- We wish you all a healthy and happy if short break.