



Rio+20 follow-up

UN DESA questionnaire related to the development of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Preliminary responses from the EU and its Member States

15 November 2012

The EU and its Member States are determined to constructively take part in the process of developing global SDGs. The responses to this questionnaire reflect the EU and its Member States' views at this stage which will develop further, since it is crucial for all partners participating in this process to listen to and build upon each other's ideas.

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.

The EU and its Member States consider that the SDGs should address and incorporate the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in a balanced, holistic, coherent and synergistic way, while capturing inter-linkages and cross-cutting issues. We recognise that SDGs should be focused on priority areas for the achievement of sustainable development, being guided by the Rio+20 outcome document and mindful of our position on such areas in the context of Rio+20. We underline the need to start an inclusive elaboration process on defining key priority areas from our perspective, taking also into account proposals by other partners.

Since the SDGs should be coherent with and integrated into the UN post-2015 development agenda, without deviating efforts from the achievement of the MDGs by 2015, their structure and content should be optimal to fit this important purpose. The work on the SDGs in combination with the review of the MDGs present us with a real opportunity to ensure coherence within an overarching, comprehensive and ambitious post-2015 agenda that will be the reference framework for our common, interlinked and mutually reinforcing policies on sustainable development, development cooperation as well as peace and security.

SDGs should capture key global challenges in the years to come while at the same time bring together the three dimensions of sustainable development. Furthermore, the SDGs should be global in nature and universally applicable to all countries, limited in number, action-oriented, easy to communicate and linked to concrete targets and indicators. In this context, the SDGs could encompass the multidimensional nature of well-being, looking beyond GDP measures and taking into account the broader concept of measuring the quality of life.

The EU is committed to listen, consider, interact and assess proposals on priority areas and on the structure of SDGs that may be proposed by other countries, the UN system, the scientific community and other stakeholders.

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 the 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)**

For the EU and its Member States, the different indents associated to the question can all be complementary, rather than alternative to each other.

SDGs should be coherent with and integrated in the UN development agenda beyond 2015 with a view to an overarching framework for post-2015, including a single set of goals and without deviating efforts from the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

Moreover, it would be useful to reflect, as appropriate, within each SDG upon the social, economic and environmental dimensions, rather than having SDGs focusing on one dimension alone.

The EU and its Member States place particular importance on the need to ensure that the overall post-2015 development agenda itself also comprises the three dimensions of sustainable development while maintaining a clear focus on poverty eradication, and recall that strong commonalities between the various strands of work already exist in practice, e.g. poverty eradication is one of the three overarching objectives of, and essential requirements for, sustainable development (WSSD §2, 2005 World Summit §48, Rio+20 §4).

The contents of SDGs should also give high consideration to the content of the MDGs and take into account the outcome of the 2013 Special Event on the Review of MDGs.

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 describe)**

For the EU and its Member States, a key use of SDGs will be to help balance economic, social and environmental dimensions in policy making, ensuring, inter alia, policy coherence and reinforcing the impact of policies which should be designed from a cross-sectoral perspective.

On a broader level, the SDGs are also expected to assist all countries in tracking progress towards a more sustainable path of development, identifying key pressures and weaknesses and further aligning/fine-tuning of efforts.

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.)

In order to ensure that SDGs are universally applicable, their thematic areas should be broad and relevant to all countries. However, SDGs could have different implications for different countries, depending on their capacities, circumstances and special characteristics, such as the level of development. In this respect, particular attention should be paid to the poorest and most fragile countries. In addition to considering differences between countries, SDGs should also be flexible and adaptable to consider diversity within countries, e.g. important variations within societies, risks of growing inequality or exclusion to be tackled within countries. SDGs should also be guided by the principles of mutual accountability, respect for national ownership and shared responsibilities.

In developing global SDGs that can also be translated into national goals, the input of all stakeholders and research-based evidence is crucial to assist in defining appropriate targets and indicators which can be measurable by all and which can be tailored to countries’ specificities.

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?**

An approach to common problems should be dynamic to reflect evolving realities. It is also necessary to consider how some issues affect different groups of people within countries, notably when it comes to inequality and social exclusion, as already mentioned in the answer to question 4.

While taking into account different national circumstances, policies, priorities, capacities and levels of development, the SDGs should be global in nature and universally applicable to all countries, limited in number, action-oriented, easy to communicate and linked to concrete targets and indicators, as already mentioned in the answer to question 1.

A clear, concrete and concise development framework at the global level will be crucial to mobilise support for sustainable development, since it is very important to avoid having two different agendas in the post-2015 framework: one on development cooperation and one on sustainable development.

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?

The EU and its Member States consider that the formulation of SDGs should be coherent with existing internationally agreed goals and targets, such as biodiversity, climate change, social protection floors and others. At the same time, the SDGs process should not be used to renegotiate existing goals and targets.

The proposal for SDGs should also reflect the three overarching objectives of and essential requirements for sustainable development – poverty eradication, changing unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development (WSSD §2, 2005 World Summit §48, Rio+20 §4).

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

In the run up to 2015, the EU and its Member States are determined to make every effort to achieve the MDGs. With regard to the post-2015 development agenda, it is important to pursue the three dimensions of sustainable development in a balanced and synergistic manner and to promote policy coherence for sustainable development. To that end, as agreed in the Rio+20 outcome document, the SDGs can contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and serve as a driver for implementation and mainstreaming of sustainable development in the UN system as a whole.

For the post-2015 development agenda, the EU and its Member States regard the UN Millennium Declaration as an important policy basis with continuing relevance, while they also acknowledge that the world has been rapidly changing over the last decade. The UN Millennium Declaration, the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, the Rio+20 outcome document “The Future We Want” and other related UN agreements can thus provide an overarching, comprehensive and ambitious foundation for the post-2015 development agenda, where poverty eradication, together with well-being and securing the means of livelihood for future generations, should be a central objective.

In order to achieve coherence and integration between the SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda, it is also important to carry out a thorough and constructive assessment of the major outcomes of all the processes relevant to this framework in the past years, identifying and highlighting elements in common considering existing similarities in scope and objectives and ensuring further convergence in the future.

Moreover, there is need to effectively coordinate the work for SDGs development and for defining the post-2015 development agenda. In this respect, it is important to ensure opportunities for the timely interaction of the two processes. In particular, a critical point in time will be in September 2013, when the 68th UNGA will hold the Special Event on the Review of MDGs.

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

In developing SDGs, we need to explore various appropriate options for establishing a dependable monitoring and accountability system, which will enable reporting both on national governments' actions and on multilateral institutions' actions, based on results oriented management and mutual accountability.

It is very important to ensure that SDGs do not simply become a long wish list of objectives without sufficient accountability. It is therefore necessary to ensure that progress towards the achievement of the SDGs be assessed and accompanied by appropriate measurable targets and indicators, while taking into account different national circumstances, capacities and levels of development, and without adding unnecessary reporting burdens. To this end, a sound monitoring system is essential to ensure effective implementation.

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?

The EU and its Member States believe that it is essential, even from the early stages of the development of the SDGs OWG's modalities, that the work of the OWG be informed by research-

based evidence and expert analysis to the maximum possible extent, as well as through the full involvement of the broadest possible range of stakeholders, expertise from civil society as a whole, including from local governments, social partners and the scientific community and from the United Nations system and specialised institutions outside the UN system, in order to ensure that a maximum of information is provided to its work. In this respect, stakeholders should be consulted throughout the whole process of developing SDGs, by participating as observers in the works of the OWG, by consultation through online platforms, roundtables and fora or by being regularly updated on the progress of the OWG and having the opportunity to provide feed-back, ideas and recommendations.

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);

It is important to focus on eradicating poverty, reducing inequalities and ensuring sustainability. Human rights, together with good governance and rule of law, should be viewed as a condition and at the same time as an end-goal for all aspects of sustainable development. Peace and security is another important precondition.

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

The EU and its Member States would like to revisit this question at a later stage.

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?

The EU and its Member States stress that it is important for the OWG to report to the UNGA in a timely fashion to also provide input to the 68th General Assembly's Special Event on the Review of the MDGs in 2013.