

SDG Questionnaire

Colombia welcomes this initiative, as it enables countries at the outset of this process to share their views on fundamental aspects of the post 2015 development framework. Nonetheless, it is noted that these are preliminary responses as we look forward to a rich and deep exchange of views over the coming months and years that will deliver a coherent, solid instrument that will be as relevant and effective for the coming decades as the MDGs have been the preceding one.

For starters, there are two considerations that frame our response. The first is that while poverty eradication must remain a driving priority for the community of nations, attention must be given to achieving more sustainable consumption and production trends. Development under the current paradigm is exceeding the planet's carrying capacity, and under these conditions poverty reductions will not be able to be sustained. The second consideration is basic to this understanding: sustainable development in fact means understanding the inherent, intrinsic linkages between the social, economic and environmental dimensions. Sustainable development is not about driving an environmental agenda, but it is underpinned by the recognition that without a functioning, healthy environment social and economic objectives can either not be met or cannot not be sustained.

- 1. Please list a limited number, preferable between 5 and 10, of the important priority areas that must be addressed through the SDGs to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.**

During the Rio+20 preparatory process, Colombia - together with other countries - presented a concept note based on extensive consultations that proposed a number of possible objectives as well as priority thematic areas under each goal. The proposal also identified linkages to the MDGs. As was noted at the time, this listing was based on extensive consultations undertaken and did not reflect priorities and interests of the countries that presented it. Based on the consultations, the following Goals would appear to have widespread support:

- Food security: production, access and nutrition
- Integrated water management for sustainable growth
- Energy for sustainable growth.
- Sustainable and resilient cities
- Healthy and productive oceans
- Sustainable consumption and production patterns
- Enhanced Employment and Livelihood Security

In Rio, and the follow up to Rio, two other issues have clearly emerged as priorities and Colombia would therefore recommend adding them to the list:

- Human health, (which is related to ecosystem health)
- Education for productive lives

In addition to the thematic Goals, it will also be necessary to define cross-cutting issues. The following are issues that have often been identified as cross-cutting:

- Equity
- Gender

2. How might the SDGs strive to balance the economy, 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).

Firstly, Colombia reiterates that economic, social and environmental issues should not be termed “pillars” for sustainable development, as this metaphor perpetuates an erroneous understanding that these elements are somehow separate. Actually, delivering on any of these three fronts requires addressing the interlinkages between them. Therefore, these should be considered as dimensions and not pillars.

In this line of thought, each SDG, if properly conceived and formulated, must necessarily, even if to different degrees, reflect the three dimensions. The challenge will lie, however, in ensuring that the suite of targets under a given goal does in fact address and encompass all three dimensions. Nonetheless, there will not be a single formula that will work across all the goals. For example, a potential target on primary education could be understood to be basically social. However, the long term economic growth of a country will depend on the education level and skill-sets of its population. There will be other targets that will incorporate all three dimensions more explicitly. For example, a target on sustainable fisheries will clearly have environmental, social and economic implications.

With regards to option b), Colombia and almost every other country in the world, has affirmed the decisive role played to date by the MDGs in catalyzing support towards ensuring that the world’s most basic needs are addressed. However, it has also been widely recognized that there is a need for a more integrated approach that can deliver on the transformational change needed to effectively address some of the major challenges humanity faces today. Therefore, while the main components of the MDGs will remain relevant beyond 2015, there is a need to integrate them into a framework that provides a more structural and systemic approach. Therefore, options a) and b) in

the questionnaire are inherently interlinked. For example, the MDG on hunger would be incorporated into an SDG on food security and nutrition.

For these reasons, the theoretical option of only expanding on MDG7, would translate into a missed opportunity of historic proportions to truly incentivize and promote the integration of these three dimensions. A critique of the MDGs has been their limited scope and the fact that they address only ends and not means. It is only if this new development agenda enable us to have the necessary depth of understanding of the issues and what is needed to deliver in a sustainable AND sustained way, that we will be able to drive transformational change. MDG7+ would be an admission of defeat before we have even started.

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 pressures leading to unsustainability.**
 - e. **Helping to balance economic, social and environmental pillars in policy making**
 - f. **Guiding development cooperation**
 - g. **Other (please describe)**

Colombia understands this question as having two distinct areas of focus: i) experience and lessons learned through MDG implementation, and ii) key uses for the SDGs that were not covered by the MDGs.

Our experience with MDGs is that they have been a key factor for Colombia in:

- The formulation of both the National Development Plan as well as municipal development plans.
- The definition, adoption, adaptation, implementation, and evaluation of cost-effective strategies, methodologies, and instruments that will make it possible to attain the MDGs.
- The development of national systems for implementation at the subnational level to guide and monitor progress toward meeting the MDGs;
- International cooperation at the sub-national and local level and along the country's borders;
- The identification, systematization, sharing, and implementation of successful practices, plans, programs, and projects for vulnerable populations: women, older adults, displaced persons, receiving populations, ethnic groups, etc. at both the national and sub-national levels.

Based on this experience, the SDGs should continue to contribute to focusing and incentivizing policy and decision making at national and sub-national levels. However, the MDGs have not delivered on precisely items d) and e).

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)

NOTE: Questions 4 and 5 need to be approached together, “Universal application” and “global in nature” should be understood as complementary concepts.

In order to arrive to a set of “universally applicable” goals, at the outset it is crucial that we focus on understanding and arriving at modalities for differentiation. In a highly globalized and interdependent world, all peoples, even if under different conditions or circumstances, share basic needs. Therefore, global aspirational goals are relevant and useful for a global society. This means that there would be goals that are recognized as important for the majority of the world’s peoples, and to which countries, within the parameters of their specific needs, priorities and possibilities, can contribute to. Some goals will be more important for a given country or region, but as a global society we will all be able to recognize and acknowledge this relevance.

Global aspirational goals will be achieved by delivering on targets that would in principle also be aspirational in so far as they are voluntary. No country would be held accountable for any specific target, and countries could decide which target to subscribe to and contribute to, in accordance to national circumstances. For example, a country with a limited landmass might assign higher priority to energy efficiency than to generation of renewable energy. In addition, targets would need to be framed to ensure that environmental, social and economic requirements are duly reflected. This would partially be achieved simply by moving beyond the minimalist approach of the MDGs, and aiming for impacts that underpin a more holistic understanding of the absence of poverty, of prosperity itself, and of the means for achieving this.

Targets would also be the level at which cross-cutting issues are incorporated into the structure. Specific targets on equity, for example, would be cornerstones, signaling effective progress towards achievement of a given goal.

There could also be targets that speak to the unique needs of certain groupings of countries, in particular fragile or post-conflict states.

At the next level, the degree of specificity and differentiation needed to reflect the enormous range of differences among and even within countries, would be reflected through indicators. Firstly, there would be a dashboard of indicators which could be defined internationally. Coming up with a sound, measurable, useful indicator is not easy. Each country could decide which, if any, of those indicators would be useful for its internal policy and decision making processes and each country could, moreover, adjust them as they see fit. This will be important as the baselines for countries differ greatly. However, it would be expected that many countries would chose to use these indicators, or to use them as a basis for arriving at their own suite of national indicators, thus generating a strong basis for comparability and aggregation at the regional or global level. Secondly, countries or regions could define with their own indicators which could be country or region specific, and which might be of interest to other countries and other regions. This would also contribute to facilitating aggregation at global or regional levels. Thirdly, countries may decide to develop suites of indicators to guide national processes that focus on addressing prevailing inequalities or internal differences, or that reflect ethnic considerations that are relevant to specific indigenous communities.

However, would need to find coherence, streamlining as much as possible, few in number or at least few that could be aggregated or assessed globally and regionally to be able to understand overall progress.

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.**

(See previous response)

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 development goals?**

Over the past decades, innumerable goals and targets have been elaborated. Most are useful referents as there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Expert guidance from agencies, universities, think-tanks and others that are familiar with this work should inform the formulation of the new development agenda. It must also be recognized however, that much has changed over the past 15 years. An array of crises – from finance to the exponential increase in natural disasters – as well as opportunities stemming from increased access to technology and information, signal the need to formulate a new suite of goals and targets that build upon past efforts but are relevant for today's world.

One key consideration, however, must inform our work: the recognition that the only thing that has made the MDGs different from other combinations of goals and targets that have had only symbolic value or been relegated to oblivion before the ink is dry, has been their capacity to muster the necessary political will for implementation. We would do well to always remember the basic formula for the MDG's success: simple, succinct, and few.

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

First of all, it is important to reach a consensus that there will be a single development agenda with a single set of Goals. Secondly, it is important that the various initiatives that are underway, planned, or that will emerge, are coordinated. This includes the work of the High Level Panel of the Secretary General; the review of the Millennium Development Goals, and the work of the Open Working Group on SDGs. It is expected that there will be considerable work and initiatives at regional level. Regional bodies, such as the regional economic commissions, should play a leading role in ensuring that outputs from the regional level are uploaded into global processes and vice-versa. Regional processes are key, given that this dimension is far closer to the specificities and realities of countries or groups of countries.

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

The question is accurately formulated as it will be key to measure progress towards achievement of defined Goals taking into account the very different baselines and starting points not only of countries, but also within countries, rather than absolute numbers. This is an important lesson from the MDGs. Another lesson is the need to provide for going beyond averages, as these can mask inequalities at all levels. This will require building up statistical capacities in countries to enable them to generate disaggregated data. The actual assessment will depend, however, on how the SDGs are ultimately structured, and how “differentiation” will be translated into practice.

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 various modalities that the UN is already developing are a good starting point: support for national consultations, mechanisms for extensive social consultations using modern IT, and expert thematic workshops. However, it will also be important to define channels for up-taking the excellent work many NGOs and CSOs are undertaking, which often have great reach and substantive depth. The participation of the private sector – which is as diverse and complex as any other major group – will require dedication and focus. This engagement is critical and the avenues for its participation are not yet clear. We have a good basis but must still work to achieve a broad alliance amongst the government, civil society, private sector and the general public.

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

These are sound principles but we also need to focus on a principle that will enable us, as a global community, to reassess our understanding of “prosperity”. There is a growing understanding that the metrics we currently use to measure “progress”, and the emphasis on consumption as a proxy for prosperity, are not only not sustainable but do not ultimately deliver wellbeing.

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

A sound starting point is to assess why MDG8 has not delivered. However, beyond this, we also need to appreciate that implementation of the SDGs will be far more complex than that for the MDGs. The SDGs speak to structural and systemic changes, to articulating linkages, to supporting difficult decisions around trade-offs. The SDGs are truly about a global partnership that involves all – governments, IGOs, NGOs, private sector from three dimensions that – to date- have operated in largely in isolation: economic (i.e. WTO and WIPO), social (i.e. ILO and WHO), and environmental

(i.e. UNEP and IOC). Therefore this new partnership will also need to be closely aligned with efforts to achieve greater global coherence.

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 Working Group would be advised to recognize the need for rigorous discipline if it is to deliver outputs that will effectively help to define the future development agenda. The reasons behind the MDGs success should be a constant referent: focused, technical, few, concise, measurable. The driver of the work should be to provide countries and stakeholders with a useful tool for catalyzing implementation at national and sub-national levels.