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Post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals and Targets Session: Goals and Targets

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As delivered

Australia supports the comprehensive set of global development priorities we all played our part in developing as part of the Open Working Group.

Together, we have made significant progress in developing a broader, more integrated, more inclusive development agenda. But we have more work to do.

The goals and targets we submit to our heads of state and government in September must be ambitious, relevant and implementable.

These targets will guide development funding, resources and effort for the next 15 years and even the small decisions we make now will have real, lasting impacts for millions of people in the years to come.

It is therefore our responsibility to ensure that the targets we agree to, are quality assured – and this means drawing from the best expert advice available.

This is not about letting the perfect be the enemy of the good. It's about doing our due diligence in the time available – for our leaders, and ultimately, for the benefit of our peoples.

We've also heard many delegations – both from developed and developing countries – recognise that we cannot ask our leaders to adopt a document that sets a target with an “x” in it, instead of a numerical value.

The technical review of 19 targets presented to us earlier this week seeks to address this issue, and goes some way towards aligning targets with international agreements. We welcome these efforts – it is a good start. But it does not go far enough, and we need to consider some of these proposals more carefully.

There are also other changes we can make to ensure targets do not in any way lower the level of ambition as expressed in existing international commitments, standards and agreements.

Let me provide a simple example.

Target 4.2 under the education goal currently reads:

“By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.”

The problem with this target is that it only refers to access, and not whether all girls and boys participate in early childhood and pre-primary education.

We need to move past the basic notion of securing access to primary education currently under the Millennium Development Goals and reflect more advanced international commitments.

In this instance, the SDGs should adopt the relevant elements under the UNESCO Muscat agreement and drive meaningful participation not just access.

This may seem like a small change (and it is), but it is vital when it comes to implementation to drive necessary and meaningful action in countries.

Another issue we face is the need for these targets to be outcomes focussed. For example, **Target 8.9** currently reads:

“By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.”

But it is critical this target move beyond policy design to focus on the outcome we are seeking to achieve

- that is, increasing the social and economic benefits of tourism and creating jobs, particularly for developing countries.

A more ambitious and outcomes target that clearly drives action would instead be:

“By 2030, increase the economic benefits [to developing countries] of sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.”

These are just two examples, but there are others.

So clearly, there is room for improvement. Clearly, we have the *time* to make these improvements.

The only thing holding us back is the fear that entering into this discussion will unravel the Open Working Group report. We cannot let political expediency and mistrust get in the way of what needs to be done.

We believe that it is possible to improve the quality of targets, without unravelling the delicate political balance we have achieved. Here's how:

Let's start with the basic understanding that the Open Working Group is the baseline for improving the targets. If there is broad agreement to do so, we edit a target. If there is not, we revert to the OWG.

This would safeguard the current level of ambition in the OWG report, while allowing us to improve areas that we agree needs to be improved.

Second, let's begin a discussion on an area of convergence – how to replace the “x” targets in the document. As put forward by the Africa group, this could be a job for the Statistical Commission, with input from subject matter experts.

Then let's move to the other elements of the TST paper which we agree should be amended – the high consensus areas.

Third, we should consider other ways to make the targets more specific, measurable and in line with international commitments, based on expert analyses.

At any stage of this process, it would be up to Member States – and Member States only – to decide whether to accept or reject these proposals.

We cannot lose from such a process. We can only stand to gain – by improving ambition and our ability to implement the SDGs.

While Australia stands ready to engage in such a process, we understand that Member States are still digesting the TST paper, and discussions still need to take place before we reach agreement on how to replace the “x” targets.

Such technical inputs should be provided to us ahead of our next negotiation session and it is essential that we set aside time in April to return to this critical issue.

Thank you.