

OWG8 Concluding Remarks of Co-Chairs (draft)

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

We have arrived at an important moment of transition. Almost one productive year has passed in which we have done some deep reflection together, and now we begin crafting a proposal on sustainable development goals.

We very much look forward to this next phase of our work and we shall provide you with what we have promised to help initiate this consensus-building phase.

Let me briefly reflect on what we have heard during this past week, where we've covered several very important issues.

Oceans and seas, forests, biodiversity

On the first cluster of issues – oceans and seas, forests and biodiversity – we have heard universal acknowledgement of their importance in a sustainable development agenda and set of goals. Their role as life-support systems was frequently mentioned. Life originated in the oceans and life on earth still depends critically on their health. Picking up on the metaphor of the Earth's lungs, if oceans are one lung, forests are the other. Forests and oceans between them are by far the richest habitats of biodiversity, on which we depend for our food supplies, medicines, livelihoods, ecosystem stability, and other vital services, and which also carry important cultural value. As one delegate put it, we need to recognize the living value of species beyond their commodity values.

So, there appears to be wide agreement that these three areas need to be reflected centrally in the SDGs. Some have suggested that one or more of the three of these areas merit stand-alone goals. Others have proposed to cluster them in a goal that would aim to enhance the benefits of ecosystems and biodiversity for all, both present and future generations.

Many have also referred to the cross-cutting nature of oceans, forests and biodiversity, suggesting that targets relating to these could be integrated under other relevant goal areas – such as poverty eradication, food security,

health, and water. This would have the potential advantage that the links between these ecosystems and biodiversity on the one hand and human well-being on the other would be made explicit.

It was pointed out that having one or more stand-alone goals on oceans, forests, and biodiversity does not preclude having cross-cutting targets as well. The major challenge we face will be to keep the number of goals few and manageable.

Many of you referred to extant international legislation and voluntary instruments that govern these areas – including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Convention on Biological Diversity, its Nagoya Protocol and Aichi Targets, the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources, and the UN non-legally-binding instrument on all types of forests – suggesting that any goals and targets in the SDGs should be aligned with and supportive of these agreements, ideally catalyzing action for more effective implementation. Some of you reminded us of the contribution of the Rio+20 outcome document to advancing the agenda in key areas such as oceans and seas.

Many mentioned the importance of capacity building, technology transfer and financing in relation to the sustainable use and management of natural resources. Scientific understanding of the health and functioning of a range of ecosystems has greatly advanced in recent years. Developing country scientists need to have the capacities and opportunities to engage fully in global research on Earth systems.

In the case of oceans, priority action areas that were identified include: marine pollution, physical alteration and destruction of marine habitat, unsustainable extraction of marine resources, such as overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and destructive fishing practices, as well as harmful subsidies that incentivize such unsustainable behaviors. Ocean acidification, sea level rise and changing patterns of extreme weather associated with climate change were also mentioned as major threats to the well-being of peoples living in small-island developing states and the many other coastal countries and communities.

In the case of forests, it was observed that governments have too seldom struck the proper balance between the livelihood and economic benefits of timber extraction and forest conversion, on the one hand, and the

multiple benefits of forest conservation. As one panelist put it, the challenge is to use public policy to create a situation where forests are worth more standing than cleared.

In the case of biodiversity, a number of drivers of its loss were mentioned, and the SDGs should help in slowing and reversing the main ones. Among them, deforestation is a major source of terrestrial biodiversity loss. Overfishing, pollution and habitat alteration including from ocean acidification are major stressors of marine biodiversity.

We heard several examples of efforts by governments and other stakeholders to give biodiversity a fairer chance to survive – whether on land or in the seas – through, for example, creation of biosphere reserves, protected areas and no-catch zones. These hold promise for reversing the tide if indigenous peoples and local communities enjoy benefits from sustainable fisheries, forest and other ecosystem management.

Promoting equality, including social equity, gender equality and women's empowerment

With respect to promoting equality, including social equity, gender equality and women's empowerment, concerns were voiced by many about the wide and in some respects widening inequalities in the world, both within and between countries. These pose a risk to social cohesion and addressing them effectively calls for social solidarity.

To use one metaphor we heard, it is critical to ensure that the *social elevator* is in good working order, so that being born into poverty is not a life sentence. This calls for affordable access of the poor and disadvantaged to education and health care as well as productive and remunerative employment opportunities. Policies supportive of entrepreneurship and small-scale enterprises can also enhance opportunities for the poor, including poor women.

Economic policies can have an important role to play in relation to promoting equality, notably to the extent that they support full employment as well as price stability, and use the taxing and spending powers of government to mitigate unequalizing effects of markets on the distribution of income, wealth and economic opportunities.

Regarding inequality between countries, these are the major source of inequality in the world, even if in the new millennium the gap between some developing countries and the developed world has been narrowing. An international enabling environment supporting equalizing growth, that is, differentially high growth rates in poorer countries to enable them to catch up with higher income countries' living standards, is a shared objective. Current trends need to be not only sustained but accelerated.

Gender inequality was overwhelmingly recognized as the most pervasive form of inequality in the world. Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment is not only a matter of human rights; it is also a fundamental condition for sustainable social and economic development. We know that depriving women of the right to realize their full human potential imposes an enormous cost on society as a whole.

There was very broad support for a two-pronged approach to reflecting gender equality and women's empowerment in the SDGs: through a stand-alone goal and mainstreaming gender equality in other goals.

In crafting a goal on gender equality and women's empowerment, we already have elements on which to build in the MDGs. Gender equality, women's rights, and women's empowerment in the SDGs must be aligned with CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, the ICPD, and the Rio+20 outcome document.

There was broad support for a number of priority actions, including: preventing and eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls; empowering women legally and economically, including through access to land and other productive assets, to inheritance rights and to finance, and providing equal access to services like education and health; and strengthening women's voice, participation in decision-making and leadership in all areas of life as well as their access to justice. Unpaid care and domestic work, disproportionately borne by women and girls, was also recognized as an area for action.

Many of you referred to the need to respect and fulfil the sexual and reproductive health and rights of all individuals, including access to sexual

and reproductive health information, education, and services. Others referred to the need to be consistent in this regard with the ICPD agreement.

Action areas on gender equality and women's empowerment are closely interdependent. Women's economic empowerment can be a powerful aid to enhancing their voice in decision making in households, communities and political life, as well as a deterrent to violence against women. Similarly, women's empowerment can have major benefits for their families' and children's health, nutrition, and education.

Social equity has other important dimensions in addition to gender equality, and these must also concern us. All vulnerable groups must be ensured equitable access to capacities and opportunities, basic services and participation in social, economic and political life. All forms of discrimination and exclusion need to be combated.

Those persons living with disabilities merit particular attention in this regard. More attention is needed in all our societies to remedying their exclusion, working with them and those who support them to achieve their fair and equitable participation in social, economic and political life.

Conflict prevention, post-conflict peacebuilding and the promotion of durable peace, rule of law and governance

Turning to the final cluster of issues, peace, rule of law, and governance are both ends in themselves and critical enablers for poverty eradication and sustainable development.

Many underlined that conflict undermines development and that peaceful societies are the basis for sustainable development. Severe inequalities of power, voice, opportunity and wealth among ethnic and other identity groups are among the sources of conflict, as are competition over natural resource wealth and transnational crime and illicit arms trade among others.

Sustainable peace and stability are essential enablers of sustainable development, while inclusive development also promotes peace and stability.

Promoting participatory governance can contribute to conflict prevention. It is crucial that such governance include both women and men as well as young people and all vulnerable groups including indigenous peoples. Transparency was identified as a key component of governance. Action in this area could promote public access to information and enhance openness of government, as well as fostering trust in government institutions. Local authorities are key actors in ensuring accountable and participatory governance.

Rule of law was mentioned as a cornerstone of society. As one speaker noted, rule of law should focus not just on fair process but on fair outcomes at national and global level. It touches on a range of sustainable development areas, including by: furthering inclusive economic growth through protection of land, property and other resource use rights; providing access to fair and responsive justice systems; and improved provision of public services. A number of speakers referred to the importance of legal identity.

A number of countries stated that the international dimension of the rule of law should not be neglected. It was also pointed out that the rule of law has developed subject to national conditions and particularities, and national ownership was emphasized.

There were calls for peace, rule of law, and governance to be reflected in goal form; many others argued that they should be dealt with in a cross-cutting manner. It was suggested that a basket of indicators could assist each country in making its institutions more effective, accountable and inclusive.

While recognizing the importance of peace, governance and rule of law, it was also underlined that the discussions of the OWG should be based on the Rio+20 Outcome document, with a focus on the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Concluding observations

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

We are about to conclude the first leg of our journey and embark on the next, decisive phase. Decisive ... because we will need to decide

collectively what goals we wish to propose – what will be their scope, their focus, their level of ambition.

Over the week, the Major Groups and civil society have made many valuable contributions to our work. Let me mention just two ideas I heard. *First*, it was observed that we will need a good *business plan* if we are to achieve our goals, and means of implementation could be viewed as part of that plan. *Second*, the question was raised of how to empower the High-Level Political Forum to perform the important oversight function with which we have entrusted it in monitoring progress towards the SDGs.

We have listened and talked a lot to one another over the past year. To paraphrase a popular advertisement, may I encourage you to *Keep talking ...* but, equally importantly, *Keep listening*.

Thank you very much.