



International IDEA

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Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals

1st Session

Follow-up to the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, relating to a proposal for sustainable development goals

Statement by
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Mr. Co-Chairs,

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) helped change the focus of development, with emphasis on improving people's lives. We reaffirm the importance for the international community of accelerating efforts at the achievement of the MDGs in the two years ahead.

However, the debate on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is an important opportunity to address some gaps in the conceptualization of the MDGs, and the emerging issues that have changed the world since 2000. These include the challenges and opportunities of a much more interconnected world, climate change and sustainable development priorities, feelings of exclusion among the rapidly expanding youth population throughout the world, increasing fractures in many societies, volatility in many economies, a multipolar world, and a strong demand for equality, dignity and justice. Also, growing inequalities are a somewhat neglected dimension in the MDGs, including on gender equality, which should be further strengthened within the SDGs.

Many delegations have recalled in this debate the relevance of the Millennium Declaration to the endeavor of the Open Working Group on the SDGs. It should be stressed that the Millennium Declaration affirmed that 'democratic and participatory governance based on the will of the people' best assures the rights of men and women 'to live their lives and raise their children in dignity, free from hunger and from the fear of violence, oppression or injustice'. In the Declaration, Heads of State and Government committed to 'implement the principles and practices of democracy and respect for human rights', to 'work collectively for more inclusive political processes, allowing genuine participation', and to 'spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development'.

One of the lessons from the ongoing efforts is that, although such commitments were not translated into the MDGs framework, there is recognition that democratic governance matters for the MDGs. Experience has shown that democratic governance bottlenecks and shortcomings may slow down their achievement. And there is a growing citizens' demand for democratic governance: governance features as the second priority indicated by people participating in the online survey on the UNDG-led global consultation website on the post-2015 development framework (www.worldwewant2015.org). This is also confirmed by the results of several citizens-led evaluations of the quality of democracy carried out around the world on the basis of International IDEA's State of Democracy Assessment methodology.

We think that democratic governance is highly relevant to the discussion on the SDGs and that it should be at the core of the post-2015 development agenda, both as a crucial enabler for the achievement of any new global goals, and as a goal in its own right.

Democratic governance and sustainable development are closely inter-related; indeed, democratic governance and full respect for human rights are key pre-requisites for empowering people to make sustainable choices. Chapter 2 of Agenda 21 forged a conceptual link between democracy and sustainable development, stating that a necessary condition for sustainable development is "progress towards democratic government"

(paragraph 2.6). The Rio +20 outcome, “The Future We Want”, acknowledged that “democracy, good governance and the rule of law, at the national and international levels, as well as an enabling environment, are essential for sustainable development” (paragraph 10).

Democratic governance is important as a goal and an enabler because democracy can facilitate equitable distribution, among other contributions to society which are key for sustainable development. Attributes of democratic governance such as transparency and accountability are essential to sustainable development processes.

Democratic governance facilitates both adapting to and mitigating against some of the most compelling social, economic and environmental challenges posed by climate change. It allows for inclusive opinion building and debate on tough and difficult choices, as in the case of pastoral peoples, or people living in environmentally vulnerable and disaster-prone areas, like small islands or river deltas. Only when performed through democratic political processes, and, therefore, based on the active engagement of men and women whose livelihoods are most affected, would such decisions be socially and politically sustainable. International IDEA stresses also the importance of involving young leaders of today, as a value in its own right, and of promoting their ownership of policies to be implemented for the future.

In conclusion, International IDEA stands committed to sharing analysis, in partnership with the UN system, which we hope will provide useful insights to advance the efforts of member states in defining the SDGs within this Open Working Group.

Thank you.