



## **Australian Government**

### **UNDESA QUESTIONNAIRE RELATED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

#### **RESPONSE FROM THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT**

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an issue of great interest to Australia. We were pleased with the Rio+20 outcome on SDGs and welcome this opportunity to further share ideas. SDGs can be the means to develop a global vision for sustainable development, balancing economic growth, social development and environmental protection, while being mutually reinforcing. Australia welcomes the universal nature of the goals and the opportunity this provides for all countries to reassess and review domestic policies and initiatives designed to support and maintain stocks of natural and social capital.

Australia was also pleased that Rio+20 reaffirmed international commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). While the international community has made significant progress in the last decade, Australia is very conscious that much work remains to be done in achieving the MDGs by 2015. This is urgent work that demands our full attention and action. It is why Australia's Prime Minister is personally so committed to the achievement of the MDGs. Prime Minister Gillard now co-chairs, at the invitation of the Secretary-General, the MDG Advocacy Group.

Looking beyond 2015, the global development agenda must remain focused on poverty eradication. But as we reaffirmed at Rio, eradicating poverty requires both an enabling environment, and a resilient natural resource base. As such, we must find a way to better integrate our economic, social and environmental imperatives. Australia looks forward to contributing actively to the development of the SDGs and their effective integration into the post-2015 development agenda.

Australia has developed a set of sustainability indicators spanning economic, social and environmental aspects. The indicators will be reported publically and are intended to inform decision making and planning on issues that affect the wellbeing of current and future Australians. While indicators and frameworks for monitoring progress towards any targets associated with global SDGs will likely be quite different to domestically focussed efforts to measure sustainability (both in Australia and elsewhere) Australia looks forward to the opportunity to share information learned in the domestic sphere to inform the international debate.

Australia's response to this questionnaire is provided as a contribution to the framing of this important discussion and is done without prejudice to any final position it may take on specific issues.

### ***Potential Goals - Important priority areas***

**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.**

Australia considers that the task of identifying priority areas will be more straightforward if countries first establish a common understanding of the relationship between the post-2015 framework, SDGs and MDGs to frame the forward discussion, otherwise there is a risk of replaying earlier debate. For this reason, Australia is still considering potential priority areas and is not in a position to identify a short-list at this point in time.

Australia notes that Member States considered priority areas for SDGs, but were not able to reach agreement by the Rio Conference in June. We expect this will continue to be a challenging debate, likely to be made more complex as Member States further explore coherency between the SDGs and the post-2015 development framework.

In proposing priority areas, the Working Group's deliberations should be informed by technical assessments, draw on key foundation documents, such as the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs, and Rio+20 "The Future We Want", and consider achievements of and lessons learned from the MDGs.

One possible starting point in the consideration of priority areas is exploring the relationship between the MDGs, the Rio+20 themes and cross-sectoral issues. This would also help bring together the SDGs and post-2015 discussions.

### ***Balancing the Three Dimensions***

**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)**

Australia supports integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development, but recognises this will be a challenging analytical task. The Working Group's discussions will need to be guided by technical expertise in designing goals that integrate economic, social and environmental outcomes. A key feature in the design of the SDGs should be that the three dimensions are mutually reinforcing and supportive.

Australia is open to consider any options to tackle this challenging issue, and does not see potential options as mutually exclusive.

### ***Application in Australia***

**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)

Please explain your choices if you would like:

SDGs could offer benefits for all the opportunities listed. In addition SDGs could be an element in enhancing the public accountability of governments and their policy choices, and provide reference points for businesses in their consideration of the impacts of their activities.

Australia further considers that SDGs could offer a useful mechanism to facilitating regional responses to development and sustainability issues, and the integration of other relevant goals and targets.

The MDGs have been successful in raising awareness of poverty, galvanising support for development and mobilising international action to reduce poverty. The SDGs should maintain what is good about the current MDGs – in particular they need to be compelling, simple, and easy to understand.

***Principles for ‘universal applicability’***

**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.)**

At Rio+20, Member States agreed that the SDGs should be universally applicable. Australia considers this means establishing global goals to which all countries, together, can agree and contribute.

Differentiation could then occur at the target or indicator levels to allow for differences in national circumstances, capacities and priorities. Governments should drive implementation with the active involvement of all relevant stakeholders, as appropriate. Further consideration may need to be given to the understanding of ‘universal applicability’ once the relationship between the post-2015 framework and the SDGs is clearer.

***Principles for ‘global in nature’***

**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.

SDGs should be part of an integrated approach which includes the targets, indicators and information needed to support measurement of progress on sustainable development.

The SDGs should be global goals, to which all countries contribute. Countries should have flexibility to choose their own pathways to contribute to the goals and use them, as appropriate, to inform their national policies and plans. Targets and indicators should be consistent where

practicable. Experience from the full range of global goals to which countries have already subscribed across a number of thematic areas should be considered in developing the framework. It will also be important that the Working Group seek input from relevant experts and specialists to ensure global targets will have national and regional policy relevance.

To assist in balancing progress towards sustainable development, there should also be opportunity for countries to work with each other in meeting their targets. The SDG design should incorporate opportunities for cooperation, and consider representation of national activities to meet the SDGs and improve understanding of global and regional activities under the SDG framework.

### ***Potential Goals – existing goals and targets***

**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 starting point for considering principles and subsequent priority areas should be the Millennium Declaration and the Rio+20 outcomes document “The Future We Want”, as discussed earlier.

As a guiding approach, wherever relevant, existing global (or broadly accepted) targets and goals should underpin and inform the SDGs. These targets and goals should not be reopened and re-negotiated through the SDGs development process. The SDG development process should also not become a parallel negotiation for goal setting where goals have been or are being set through other mandated processes. Existing negotiating mandates, such as for climate change or trade rules, should be respected.

### ***Integration with post 2015***

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

The post-2015 development agenda should contain a single set of goals. The SDG and post-2015 processes should be considered as one process with one outcome.

To ensure this occurs, the Working Group must link with other UN post-2015 consultative and advisory processes, such as the Secretary-General’s High Level Panel. Efforts should be made to ensure that Working Groups’ outcomes and recommendations align with the post-2015 development agenda.

### ***Reporting – assessment of progress***

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

In bringing forward potential goals, a fundamental consideration must be whether it can be meaningfully measured and relevant data is available. A range of technical activities could be undertaken to inform the consideration of this issue. In particular, the Working Group should consider the effectiveness of other global reporting arrangements, such as the MDG framework, the OECD’s Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies, and the Human Development Index. It is important to work towards an institutional framework which will effectively support implementation and the reporting required to track progress.

As the Goals are global there must be some form of global measurement. In the context of the MDGs, experience has shown that while global and regional-level reporting is useful, it can mask important information at country-levels that could help inform priority-setting. There should not be additional burden placed on countries to report, so the targets and indicators must be prepared so that reporting progress is not the largest part of the job.

Consistent with 'The Future We Want' the Working Group should also consult with the UN Statistical Commission and other relevant organisations to consider the opportunity of using broader measures of progress that complement gross domestic product.

### ***Process – inclusive and participatory***

#### **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?**

An inclusive and participatory process is essential if CSOs, the private sector and academia are to 'buy-in' to the goals and the SDGs are to achieve their objectives. Governments should work to engage in discussion forums and information sessions for key relevant stakeholder groups.

The Working Group processes need to be transparent and include robust consultation, with all interested and relevant actors, specialists and technical experts, including by leveraging other UN lead processes. Regular updates on the Working Groups' progress also need to be provided. Ideally, consultation and reporting milestones will be built in to the OWG's work program.

An example of this type of consultation was recently undertaken in Australia by the Bureau of Statistics which held a national consultation to find out what is important to Australians for the nation's progress. This consultation was recently showcased at the 4th World Forum, hosted by the OECD and the Indian government in New Delhi in October 2012, and will form the base for the development of a new set of progress measures in late 2013.

### ***Principles to underpin the goals***

#### **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)**

In developing principles, Australia does not support selectively referencing previous agreements

Australia supports a small number of focused principles to underpin the SDGs. These principles should be agreed as an initial first step so that they may guide the process for developing SDGs. Drawing from Rio+20, these could include that the Goals:

- integrate the three pillars of sustainable development
- complement any existing goals or targets internationally
- incorporate a level of flexibility to recognize different approaches to implementation.

Once the relationship between the SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda becomes clearer, it may be necessary to further consider the modalities agreed at Rio+20. While flexibility in implementation of the SDGs is important, it is equally important to ensure that all countries work together towards sustainable development. Negatively framed principles that seek to commit

developed countries to undertake particular actions while diminishing the level of reporting required by other countries should be avoided. Selective highlighting of principles should also be avoided and recognition should be given to the hard-won consensus that has frequently underpinned previous global efforts to codify agreed principles.

### ***Cooperation Framework – Global Partnership***

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

While the specific nature of any cooperation frameworks can be determined once the SDGs framework is clearer, it is important that any cooperation framework effectively links into the evolving institutional framework for sustainable development.

Australia is committed to seeing a strengthened multilateral system that will more effectively govern sustainable development and is working with member states and other parties to achieve agreement on the best possible solutions for strengthening the current institutional framework.

Consistent with “The Future We Want”, it would also need to consider, in addition to traditional official development assistance, the role of new and emerging development players and modalities, including triangular and south-south cooperation. Outcomes from the MDG Review would also need to be considered.

### ***Other Inputs***

#### **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’s initial focus needs to be on establishing the principles that will underpin SDGs. These would then guide discussions on the potential architecture and areas of focus.

Poverty reduction must be central to the global development agenda, recognising that if we do not maintain our natural and social capital we cannot effectively reduce poverty.

Domestic efforts to improve, encourage and measure sustainability being undertaken by member States, should be drawn on throughout the Working Group’s work.

SDGs will need to consider the challenges faced by Small Island Developing States, least developed countries, and middle income countries with large populations living in poverty.

Time permitting; the release of thought pieces and or case studies on current best practice could facilitate international engagement with the SDG process, strengthening its credibility.

Australia looks forward to having further opportunities to share our views and ideas as they evolve.