

A Multi-stakeholder Message: Key principles in the formulation of Sustainable Development Goals

The outcome statement of the June 2012 United Nations Summit on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) – entitled “The Future We Want” – proposed, among other items, the creation of Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) post-2015. “The Future We Want” and its proposal for SDGs were subsequently endorsed by heads of government and high-level representatives from all United Nations members. The outcome highlights that sustainable development “can only be achieved with a broad alliance of people, governments, civil society and private sector, all working together to secure the future we want for present and future generations”. A process is now under way to develop SDG proposals for member states to consider and negotiate, with a final agreement in 2015.

In conceptualizing the SDGs, some important principles come to fore in the Rio+20 Outcome document:

1. The goals should be action-oriented, concise and easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable, while taking into account different national realities.
2. They should “address and incorporate in a balanced way all three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental – and their interlinkages”.
3. They should be coherent with and integrated into the UN development agenda beyond 2015.
4. They should be developed in “an inclusive and transparent intergovernmental process on SDGs that is open to all stakeholders”.

The UN secretary-general’s report, *A Life in Dignity for All*, and debate at the Special Event on the MDGs and the Post-2015 Development Agenda at the UN General Assembly’s (UNGA) 68th session in September 2013 reiterated the centrality of these core principles. At the Special Event, member states decided to launch a process of intergovernmental negotiations at the beginning of the 69th session of the UNGA in autumn 2014, which will lead to the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda thus “merging” the SDG and MDG processes

In addition to these principles, a Task Force on Sustainable Development Goals¹ convened under the World Economic Forum’s Global Agenda Council on Governance for Sustainability considers that, building on Griggs et al (2013)²:

1. Poverty reduction and human well-being shall be pursued in the context of the protection of the Earth’s life-support system (planetary boundaries)
2. The SDGs should be based on the interwoven nature of the three dimensions of sustainable development through a nested or “triple helix” approach, implying that all dimensions are inseparably connected.
3. The SDGs should be construed in the context of planetary well-being, in their global, regional and national dimensions, as well as the concepts of sustainable consumption and production and natural resource management, thus considering values that represent safe limits for climate change; rate of terrestrial and marine biodiversity loss; interference with the nitrogen and phosphorous cycles; stratospheric ozone depletion; ocean acidification; scarcity of clean freshwater; destruction of land; chemical pollution; and atmospheric aerosol loading.

¹ A Task Force on Sustainable Development Goals was established in November 2012 in Dubai, chaired by Ms. Ida Auken and Mr. Ricardo Meléndez-Ortiz, in their capacity as members of the World Economic Forum’s Global Agenda Council on Governance for Sustainability, chaired by Mr James Bacchus. Members of other councils under the World Economic Forum’s Global Agenda Council network were invited to participate. This message is the result of deliberations during the year and discussions at a cross council workshop during the World Economic Forum’s 2013 Summit on the Global Agenda in Abu Dhabi. Endorsements are listed in the body of the message.

² Sustainable Development Goals for People and Planet. Nature (Vol 495, 21 March 2013). By David Griggs, Mark Stafford-Smith, Owen Gaffney, Johan Rockström, Marcus C. Öhman, Priya Shyamsundar, Will Steffen, Gisbert Glaser, Norichika Kanie and Ian Noble.

4. The SDGs should be measurable, based on latest research and indicators and apply to developed and developing countries.

The Task Force proposes that six updated MDGs coalesce into new SDGs under the SDG and Post-2015 processes. The Task Force also takes as a reference the “triple helix” approach to the design of the SDGs, through which economic development, social inclusion and environmental sustainability should be integrated and balanced throughout the SDG structure as well as the guidance of the illustrative goals presented by the UN Secretary Generals High Level Panel on the Post 2015 Development Agenda. Further the food water energy nexus should be taken into account in the future post 2015 framework. As such, the group proposes – in the form of a Multistakeholder Inspirational Message to the SDG and post-2015 processes – six key goals, which will be further developed:

- *thriving lives and livelihoods*
- *sustainable food security*
- *sustainable water security*
- *universal clean energy*
- *healthy and productive ecosystems*
- *governance for sustainable societies*

In articulating ways and means of implementation, due attention should be given to new financing models as well as to exploring new ways of collaboration between stakeholders; active involvement of, and cooperation with, the private sector; and civil society participation, following an integrated approach. Indeed, the Task Force’s support for this conceptual approach is informed by its genuinely multistakeholder membership, which includes representatives of the public and private sectors as well as civil society. It also reflects Task Force members’ experience in managing and studying the global value chains of production that increasingly define the shape of international trade and the global economy of today.

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