

## RIO+20: SHIFTING FROM MILLENNIUM TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

### *Poverty eradication and sustainability: two sides of the same coin*

Goals set by the international community can be powerful tools for global progress. The [Millennium Development Goals](#) have helped to focus leaders, policy makers, development practitioners, and civil society on the needs of the poorest countries and households. As such, the MDGs—which last until 2015—continue to attract strong support.

In the lead-up to the [UN Conference on Sustainable Development](#) (Rio+20) that should help define the sustainable development agenda for the coming decades, the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, which would be broader in scope than the MDGs and universal in character, have attracted increasing attention. At the same time, many stakeholders argue that the SDGs must not conflict with efforts to achieve the MDGs, and that poverty eradication must be a key focus of the SDGs.

Much progress has been made in reducing income poverty, hunger, and other forms of material deprivation during the past two decades. However, this progress is unlikely to endure if it comes with irreversible ecological damage. Likewise, poor, hungry households without reliable access to modern energy services have strong incentives to clear cut forests for heating and cooking fuel, or to use land unsustainably. These incentives are no different than those that faced the residents of wealthy countries when they were at similar levels of development. What is different now is that the ecological costs of such behavior today much greater. In order to achieve inter-generational equity—ensuring that “future generations can meet their own needs”—intra-generational equity must be pursued today. Steps need to be taken to offer poor and vulnerable households and countries “a seat at the table” of development progress. In this sense, poverty reduction and environmental sustainability are two sides of the same coin.

### *UNDP and the SDGs*

- UNDP recognizes that the normative dimensions of the SDGs (e.g., their key objectives, nature, characteristics) should be defined by the member states.
- UNDP supports the creation of a single set of post-2015 global development goals that would be based on the [Millennium Declaration](#), and which would make the global development framework as effective and coherent as possible.
- Because of its experience in supporting national efforts to apply and achieve the MDGs, UNDP and the UN system can help member states develop the SDGs’ technical parameters.

### *The SDGs in the Rio+20 negotiations*

Fortunately, Rio+20’s emphasis on sustainable development is fully compatible with the MDGs and their emphasis on poverty eradication, equity and inclusion. This is apparent in a number of respects:

- While the negotiations over the outcome document have taken many twists and turns, language on the continuing validity of the MDGs through 2015, and the need for strong efforts to fulfil them, has been a constant feature.
- Support for the SDGs—*inter alia* as a tool for continuing efforts to eradicate poverty after 2015—has likewise been building throughout the Rio+20 preparatory process. While many civil society groups initially promoted the SDGs as environmental-focused goals, Colombia and other member states have worked to ensure that poverty eradication remains a focus of the SDGs.
- Some delegations have called for an SDG that would be devoted solely to poverty eradication. Others insist that poverty eradication be a cross-cutting theme, or a characteristic of all SDGs. Either way, the SDGs and poverty eradication are seen as strongly linked.
- In order to strengthen this link, most member states agree that there should be a single, coherent set of post-2015 global goals, rather than a two track (MDGs for poverty alleviation, SDG for sustainability) approach.

While the contents of the Rio+20 outcome document are difficult to predict with certainty, it seems likely that it will call for a continued emphasis on poverty reduction—within the

context of more rapid progress towards sustainable development. The SDGs can be helpful in both respects.

### *The MDGs, the SDGs, and the post-2015 development agenda*

Rio+20 seems likely to provide an opportunity to set forth the characteristics on which a post-2015 framework could be grounded. These should be people-centred and focus on poverty reduction, as well as on environmental sustainability. The elaboration of the SDGs (or the principles that underpin them) should therefore reflect the various [MDG catalysers](#), such as access to energy, women's empowerment, decent jobs, education, and water—as identified in the [outcome document of the 2010 MDG summit](#). Post-2015, there should be only one integrated development framework to replace the MDGs and to measure progress. The [Millennium Declaration](#), with its focus on peace and stability, as well as development, could be used to frame the discussions on the post-2015 agenda.

In Rio+20, governments could agree:

- On the thematic areas for SDGs;
- On their main characteristics; and
- To give a mandate to the UN to further flesh out the technical dimensions of the SDGs, in order to ensure their alignment and incorporation in a post-2015 framework.

This would entail setting forth a unifying, integrated process that would seek to reach an agreement on a single set of post-2015 global development goals post 2015. It would also mean establishing the appropriate roles and division of labour between member states and the UN system in this process.

### *The SDGs' architecture*

As the MDG experience shows, setting goals alone is no guarantee of success. Partnerships, national ownership and adaptation to national (and sub-national) conditions, finance, monitoring and evaluation, shared values, and accountability systems are also extremely important. The [Millennium Declaration](#) provides an already agreed common ground from which principles and ideas can be drawn. The elaboration of the SDGs needs to be followed by a clear infrastructure for implementation, indicating which resources, technologies, knowledge, and capacities will support the SDGs in practice.

An agreement at Rio+20 to move towards the elaboration of the SDGs and in this way clarify the relationship between the MDGs and the post-2015 development framework could yield important additional benefits in two areas:

- Many observers have called for the creation of a regular high-level review body to assess national and global progress made towards sustainable by governments and other stakeholders, on a voluntary basis. The private sector and civil society should also have a place at the table. This body could also be changed with reviewing progress towards meeting the SDGs.
- The SDGs could be the framework to define, implement and monitor progress towards the green economy, in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, as per national priorities.

### *What might the SDGs look like?*

Possible characteristics of the SDGs, either individually or collectively, could include:

- An **emphasis on poverty eradication** as a component feature of each SDG.
- **Universality in application**, and conducive to creating a global enabling environment for progress toward sustainable development and poverty reduction.
- **Integrating all three strands of sustainable development** (economic, environmental and social).
- **Reflecting considerations of equity** (including intergenerational equity), inclusiveness, and planetary boundaries.
- **Ensuring appropriate integration of cross-cutting issues**, such as gender, capacity development, and innovation.
- **Building on the MDGs**, particularly in terms of those goals in which significant progress has been achieved. Education and health, which are a major focus of the MDGs (MDG2,4, 5, and 6), should retain their importance under the SDGs,
- **Reflecting lessons learned from the MDGs**, particularly in terms of the specification of targets and indicators.
- **Simplicity in design** and cognizance of qualitative and quantitative data constraints.
- **Focused and limited in number**, to facilitate monitoring and simple communication about progress.
- **Addressing problems requiring collective action**, while also acknowledging the '[Rio principle](#)' of common but differentiated responsibilities (principle 7).
- **Flexibility and adaptability at the national level**, while also setting minimum standards and levels of ambition, and allowing for the inclusion of national specific targets for vulnerable and excluded populations.
- **Serving as an integral part** of the post-2015 development agenda.

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