

TEXTE

18/2014

Towards Sustainable Development Goals: Working Paper

ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH OF THE
FEDERAL MINISTRY FOR THE
ENVIRONMENT, NATURE CONSERVATION,
BUILDING AND NUCLEAR SAFETY

Project No. (FKZ) 3712 19 100
Report No. (UBA-FB) 001909/E

Towards Sustainable Development Goals: Working Paper

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UMWELTBUNDESAMT

Imprint

Publisher:

Umweltbundesamt
Wörlitzer Platz 1
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www.facebook.com/umweltbundesamt.de
www.twitter.com/umweltbundesamt

Study performed by:

Ecologic Institute, Pfalzburger Str. 43/44, 10717 Berlin

Study completed in:

June 2013

Edited by:

Section I 2.7
International Environmental Protection, International
Sustainability Strategies, National Focal Point of the
European Environment Agency
Hans-Joachim Hermann

Publikation as pdf:

<http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/en/publikationen/towards-sustainable-development-goals-working-paper#overlay-context=en>

ISSN 1862-4804

Dessau-Roßlau, February 2014

Berichtskennblatt

Berichtsnummer	UBA-FB 00
Titel des Berichts	Towards Sustainable Development Goals: Working Paper
Autor(en) (Name, Vorname)	Meyer-Ohlendorf, Nils Görlach, Benjamin McFarland, Keighley
Durchführende Institution (Name, Anschrift)	Ecologic Institut gGmbH Pfalzburger Str. 43/44 10717 Berlin Germany
Fördernde Institution	Umweltbundesamt Postfach 14 06 06813 Dessau-Roßlau
Abschlussdatum	Juni 2013
Forschungskennzahl (FKZ)	3712 19 100
Seitenzahl des Berichts	35
Zusätzliche Angaben	
Schlagwörter	SDG, sustainable development goals, MDG, millennium development goals, post-2015, United Nations, Rio Conference, COP, Conference of the Parties

Report Cover Sheet

Report No.	UBA-FB 00
Report Title	Towards Sustainable Development Goals: Working Paper
Author(s) (Family Name, First Name)	Meyer-Ohlendorf, Nils Görlach, Benjamin McFarland, Keighley
Performing Organisation (Name, Address)	Ecologic Institut gGmbH Pfalzburger Str. 43/44 10717 Berlin Germany
Funding Agency	Umweltbundesamt Postfach 14 06 06813 Dessau-Roßlau
Report Date	June 2013
Project No. (FKZ)	3712 19 100
No. of Pages	35
Supplementary Notes	
Keywords	SDG, sustainable development, sustainable development goals, MDG, millennium development goals, post-2015, United Nations, Rio Conference, COP, Conference of the Parties, development policy

Kurzbeschreibung

Die Rio+20-Konferenz im Jahr 2012 hat beschlossen, einen Prozess zur Verabschiedung von globalen Nachhaltigkeitszielen (Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs) zu etablieren. Dieser Prozess ist eng verbunden mit einem anderen Prozess, der post-2015-Entwicklungsagenda, zu der auch die zukünftigen Millennium-Entwicklungsziele (Millennium Development Goals, MDGs) gehören. Die SDGs sollen verschiedene Aspekte menschlicher Entwicklung ansprechen, von der Armutsbekämpfung und Gesundheit bis zum Schutz der globalen Ökosysteme. Die SDGs liefern dabei den Rahmen für spezifische Unterziele, die den unterschiedlichen Kapazitäten und Ausgangsbedingungen der 193 UN-Mitgliedsstaaten Rechnung tragen. Im Anbetracht der politischen und ökonomischen Veränderungen, die in vielen Teilen der Welt seit der Verabschiedung der MDGs im Jahr 2000 stattgefunden haben, müssen die SDGs mehr sein als eine bloße Fortschreibung oder eine geringfügige Anpassung der bisherigen MDGs. Verschiedene Weltregionen haben in der Zwischenzeit eine Phase des rapiden ökonomischen Wachstums durchlaufen, der einerseits Millionen Menschen aus der Armut befreit hat, aber andererseits neue Herausforderungen mit sich bringt. So sind die Früchte des Wachstums in vielen Ländern ungleich verteilt. Zudem ist zusammen mit der Wirtschaft meist der Verbrauch von Energie und natürlichen Ressourcen gewachsen, bis zu dem Punkt, wo die negativen Folgen des Wachstums – in Form von Schäden an Umwelt und Gesundheit – einen Teil der positiven Folgen zunichtemachen. Vor diesem Hintergrund beschreibt dieser Bericht zunächst die beiden Prozesse zur Entwicklung von SDGs und zur post-2015-Entwicklungsagenda sowie die Diskussionen, die Ergebnisse beider Prozesse zu einem Satz gemeinsamer Ziele zusammenzuführen. Der Bericht erörtert weiterhin die mögliche Struktur der SDGs, und diskutiert verschiedene Handlungsfelder, um einen Eindruck davon zu geben, welche möglichen Inhalte zukünftige SDGs abdecken könnten.

Abstract

The Rio + 20 Conference in 2012 decided to launch a process to adopt Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This process is closely linked to another target-setting process, the post-2015 development agenda, which includes discussions on the future of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Both processes are currently underway. As a global set of targets, the SDGs are supposed to address the most relevant aspects of human development, ranging from poverty eradication and human health to safeguarding the global ecosystems on which humanity depends for its survival. But it is also clear and agreed that meaningful SDGs must set priorities and should not attempt to cover all facets of sustainable development. The SDGs, themselves global in nature, are also supposed to act as a framework for specific targets, which take into account the very different capacities and circumstances of 193 UN Member States. Given the significant political and economic changes that the world has seen since 2000, when the MDGs were adopted, successful SDGs cannot be a simple extension or a minor adjustment of the existing MDGs. Several world regions have achieved rapid and continuous economic growth during this period. This has lifted millions of people out of poverty, but it also presents a new set of challenges. For instance, in many countries, the benefits of growth have been distributed unequally. Also, the rapid economic growth in parts of the world has coincided with an equally rapid growth in the consumption of energy, natural resources and other material inputs, to the point where the increase in economic welfare – after accounting for the side-effects of growth, such as environmental degradation – is considerably less than the growth in incomes. Against this background, this report first describes the two processes for the development of SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda, and the options to integrate the results of both processes in order to arrive at one set of goals. It goes on to discuss the possible structure of a set of SDGs, and discusses a number of topic clusters, as an illustration of what possible SDGs could look like.

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List of Abbreviations

10-YFP	Ten-Year-Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
DMC	Domestic Material Consumption
GA	General Assembly (of the United Nations)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HLP	High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda
JPoI	Johannesburg Plan of Implementation
MDG	Millenium Development Goal
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OWG	Open Working Group
SCP	Sustainable Consumption and Production
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SE4all	Sustainable Energy for all
SG	Secretary-General (of the United Nations)
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Towards Sustainable Development Goals: Working Paper

1 Zusammenfassung

Der Rio + 20 Gipfel hat entschieden, einen Prozess zur Annahme von Nachhaltigkeitszielen (Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)) zu starten. Dieser Prozess hat mit der Einberufung einer zwischenstaatlichen Arbeitsgruppe Anfang 2013 begonnen und soll 2014 enden. Der SDG-Prozess ist eng mit einem anderen Zielsetzungsprozess verbunden: der post-2015 Entwicklungsagenda. Die post-2015 Entwicklungsagenda, die mit der Gründung des High Level Panels im Juni 2012 begann, wird voraussichtlich Ende 2015 abgeschlossen sein.

Die SDGs sollen nicht weniger erreichen, als zu helfen, die Welt auf den Weg nachhaltiger Entwicklung zu bringen. Als globale Zielvorgaben sollen die SDGs die wichtigsten Aspekte menschlicher Entwicklung angehen, angefangen bei Armutsbeseitigung und Gesundheit bis zur Sicherung der Ökosysteme, auf die die Menschheit angewiesen ist. Die SDGs, eigentlich globaler Natur, sollen auch als Rahmen für spezifische Ziele dienen, die die sehr unterschiedlichen Ausgangssituationen der 193 UN-Mitgliedsstaaten berücksichtigen. Dies macht die Entwicklung der SDGs zu einer hochgradig komplexen Aufgabe. Trotz dieser Komplexität kann der Entwicklungsprozess der SDGs auf eine Anzahl von Elementen zurückgreifen. Dazu zählen: (1) die MDG Erfahrungen berücksichtigen, (2) das bereits existierende internationale Rahmenwerk und die MDGs als Ausgangspunkt für Verhandlungen nutzen, (3) „one set of goals“ annehmen, (4) die SDG- und MDG-Prozesse erfolgreich miteinander verbinden und (5) SDGs wählen, die ambitioniert genug sind, um die tiefgreifenden Herausforderungen für weltweite Entwicklung erfolgreich anzugehen.

1.1 Erkenntnisse aus den Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Die MDGs haben sich als außerordentlich erfolgreich dabei erwiesen, Aufmerksamkeit auf die großen Herausforderungen menschlicher Entwicklung zu lenken und entsprechend Ressourcen zu konzentrieren. Im Unterschied zu anderen internationalen Vereinbarungen zu nachhaltiger Entwicklung sind die MDGs ein zentraler Bezugspunkt zum Messen wichtiger Aspekte menschlicher Entwicklung und haben zur Armutsbeseitigung beigetragen. Dies bietet eine Anzahl von positiven Erkenntnissen: Weil die MDGs eindeutig, zahlenmäßig begrenzt und quantifiziert sind und auf allgemein verfügbaren Daten basieren, sind sie einfach vermittelbar. Diese Vermittelbarkeit hat dazu beigetragen, dass die MDGs zu einem zentralen Bezugspunkt in internationaler Entwicklungspolitik und darüber hinaus geworden sind. In dieser Hinsicht haben die MDGs ihr wichtigstes Ziel erreicht. Um auch in Zukunft eine vergleichbare Rolle zu spielen, müssen die SDGs ähnlich eindeutig, zahlenmäßig begrenzt und - vor allem – durch quantifizierte und zeitlich gebundene Ziele und Indikatoren messbar bleiben.

Aus den MDGs lassen sich aber auch einige negative Erfahrungen ziehen. MDGs sind besonders erfolgreich in Politikbereichen gewesen, in denen Fortschritte keine systematischen Veränderungen der Wirtschaft oder Gesellschaft erforderten. Die MDGs waren dagegen schwach in den Bereichen sozialer Gerechtigkeit, Verteilungsgerechtigkeit und sozialer Ausgrenzung. Das MDG 7 im Bereich ökologischer Nachhaltigkeit ist besonders schwach, da es entscheidende Themen wie Klimawandel, Landdegradation oder Meere nicht umfasst, während andere, wie zum Beispiel Trinkwasser oder Sanitäreinrichtung, scheinbar wahllos hervorgehoben werden. Dies ist ein bedeutendes Defizit, weil stetig steigende Umweltbelastungen, Ressourcenknappheit und Klimawandel das Potenzial haben, Entwicklungserfolge zunichte zu machen. Die MDGs verpflichten nur Entwicklungsländer zum Handeln und wenden sich deshalb nicht an entwickelte Länder – mit Ausnahme einiger Ziele der MDG 8, die internationale Kooperationen und öffentliche Entwicklungshilfe betreffen.

1.2 One Set of Goals: die MDGs als Kern für die SDGs

Obwohl die UN-Mitgliedsstaaten den MDGs nicht formal zugestimmt haben, sind sie weithin akzeptiert und haben eine hohe politische Durchschlagskraft. Das ist eine bemerkenswerte Leistung, wenn man bedenkt, wie schwierig weltweite Übereinkünfte zu Entwicklungszielen zu erreichen sind. Die politische Durchschlagskraft der MDGs bedeutet auch, dass es sinnvoll wäre, den SDG-Prozess an den MDG-Prozess anzugleichen.

Allerdings ergibt sich daraus die Frage, wie diese Angleichung in der Praxis aussehen würde und in welchem Umfang die SDGs die existierenden MDGs ergänzen und korrigieren sollten. Analytiker haben diese Diskussion unter den Begriffen „MDG plus“, „revised MDGs plus strong SDGs“, „One World Goals“ oder „two-track approach“ gefasst. Diese Terminologie dient dazu, die Diskussion einzugrenzen, birgt aber auch das Risiko, das allgemeine Terminologien wie „MDG plus“ oder „two-track-approach“ die politische Diskussion verkomplizieren und verlangsamen. Die Terminologie verschleiert, dass letztendlich nur der exakte Inhalt der SDGs eine Rolle spielt. Aus diesem Grund sollten konkrete Ziele im Mittelpunkt der Diskussionen stehen und nicht vage Terminologie.

Die SDGs und MDGs sind in Prozess und Inhalt eng verbunden. Es gibt verschiedene Wege, MDGs und SDGs zu verbinden, aber die Integration der beiden Prozesse, um „one set of goals“ zu kommen, erscheint als die vernünftigste Alternative. Ein einheitliches Set von Zielen verhindert Dopplungen und Widersprüche. Die SDGs sollten ein integriertes Set von Zielen enthalten, die ein angemessenes Verhältnis zwischen Entwicklungsbedürfnissen und ehrgeizigem Umweltschutz herstellen. Bestehende MDGs und eine Anzahl von konkreten Angeboten für zusätzliche Nachhaltigkeitsziele sollten der Ausgangspunkt der SDG-Verhandlungen sein. Dies erfordert eine Anpassung der MDGs an steigende Umweltbelastungen durch das Hinzufügen robuster Nachhaltigkeitsziele. Dies ist letztendlich eine Frage der Organisation der benötigten politischen Unterstützung; die derzeitige Struktur der MDGs stellt per se kein Hindernis für die Erstellung eines integrierten und ambitionierten Sets von Zielen dar.

1.3 Verflechtung der MDG und SDG Verhandlungen

Keiner der beiden Verhandlungsprozesse von MDGs und SDGs steht kurz vor einer Einigung. Daraus ergibt sich die Möglichkeit, sie zu einem einzigen Verhandlungsprozess zusammenzuführen, da dies einfacher ist, wenn in keiner der Verhandlungen eine Einigung bezüglich der Ziele kurz bevor steht. Solch eine Verbindung sollte im Interesse der beteiligten Akteure liegen: SDG- und MDG-Verhandlungspartner haben – grundsätzlich – ein Interesse daran, Konflikte und Dopplungen der Ziele zu vermeiden.

Der UN-Generalsekretär hat vorgeschlagen, das Special Event zu den MDGs nach 2015, das für September 2013 angesetzt ist, zu nutzen, um die beiden Prozesse auf eine Linie zu bringen. Es erscheint in der Tat vernünftig, die beiden Prozesse im Rahmen eines Special Events zusammenzuführen. Dort könnte vereinbart werden, dass eine aufgewertete SDG-Arbeitsgruppe oder andere Nachfolgegremien die Verhandlungen zu einem gemeinsamen Set von Zielen weiterführen.

Konsenspunkte

Obwohl es eine Anzahl kontroverser Themen gibt, die sich häufig auf Umfang und Grad der durch die SDGs vertretenen politischen Ambitionen beziehen, können die politischen Diskussionen auf den folgenden Konsenspunkten aufbauen:

- SDGs werden nicht rechtlich bindend sein, sondern eine politische Verpflichtung darstellen,

- SDGs – im Gegensatz zu den derzeitigen MDGs – werden nicht nur den Einsatz der Entwicklungsländer, sondern auch der entwickelten Länder fordern,
- SDGs beinhalten übergeordnete Ziele, welche jeweils von einigen untergeordneten Zielsetzungen spezifiziert werden, die wiederum von Indikatoren gestützt und geprägt werden, sie werden also eine Struktur wie die MDGs haben,
- SDGs sollten den Schwerpunkt auf Ziele und Zielsetzungen setzen, anstatt sich an Diskussionen zu Rahmenbedingungen oder gar Instrumenten zu beteiligen,
- Um effektiv zu sein, müssen SDGs begrenzt in der Anzahl sein und auf ausgewählten vorrangigen Bereichen basieren. Sie sollten nicht den Anspruch haben, alle Aspekte nachhaltiger Entwicklung abzudecken. Wenn alles Priorität ist, hat nichts Priorität.

1.4 Aussagekräftige Ziele: Inhalt und Umfang der SDGs

Wenn man die tiefgreifenden politischen und wirtschaftlichen Veränderungen betrachtet, die sich seit 2000, dem Jahr in dem die MDGs festgelegt wurden, ergeben haben, wird klar, dass die SDGs nicht nur eine einfache Erweiterung oder geringfügige Anpassung der existierenden MDGs sein können. Mehrere Weltregionen haben seit 2000 schnelles und kontinuierliches wirtschaftliches Wachstum erlebt. Dies hat Millionen Menschen aus der Armut befreit, bringt aber auch viele neue Herausforderungen mit sich. In vielen Ländern wurden beispielsweise die durch Wachstum erzielten Gewinne ungleich verteilt, sodass nur kleinere Teile der Bevölkerung profitieren. Zudem geht das schnelle Wirtschaftswachstum mit einem stark gestiegenen Verbrauch von Energie, natürlichen Ressourcen und anderer Materialien zusammen. Dies kann dazu führen, dass die Zunahme der Wirtschaftsleistung – nach Einberechnung der Kosten für die Nebeneffekte des Wachstums, wie zum Beispiel Umweltprobleme – erheblich geringer ausfällt als angenommen.

Die SDGs sind eine Gelegenheit, internationale Initiativen und Prozesse für nachhaltige Entwicklung zu reaktivieren. Um dies zu erreichen, müssen die SDGs auch mit den großen nicht-nachhaltigen Tendenzen befassen, und eine Richtung für die transformativen Herausforderungen der Zukunft vorgeben – wie Wirtschaftssysteme auf der Welt sich verändern müssen, um einen Weg der Nachhaltigkeit einzuschlagen.

Ohne Anspruch auf Vollständigkeit können folgende Herausforderungen eine Rolle spielen:

- Wohlstandswachstum vom Verbrauch natürlicher Ressourcen und Materialien entkoppeln und gleichzeitig sicherstellen, dass der Nutzen des Wachstums gerecht verteilt wird;
- Geschlechtergleichstellung, Zugang zu Bildung und gesundheitlicher Versorgung gewährleisten, um Armut zu beseitigen;
- Nahrungsmittelversorgung und Böden als unerlässliche Produktionsressourcen für eine wachsende und zunehmend wohlhabende Bevölkerung sichern und gleichzeitig Ökosysteme und Biodiversität erhalten;
- Universellen Zugang zu modernen und nachhaltigen Energiedienstleistungen herstellen;
- weltweite Treibhausgasemissionen senken sowie lokale Luftschadstoffe reduzieren;
- Zugang zu sauberem Trinkwasser und sanitären Anlagen gewährleisten und das Problem des Wassermangels im Zusammenhang mit dem Klimawandel angehen.

2 Summary

The decision was made at the Rio + 20 Conference to launch a process to adopt Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This process has started in full with the establishment of an intergovernmental working group in early 2013, and is supposed to end by 2014. The SDG process is closely linked to another target-setting process, the post-2015 development agenda, which includes discussions on the future of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The post-2015 development agenda, which began in full with the establishment of the High-Level Panel in June 2012, is expected to end in late 2015.

The SDGs should achieve no less than to provide guidance on how to develop the world sustainably. As a global set of targets, the SDGs are supposed to address the most relevant aspects of human development, ranging from poverty eradication and human health to safeguarding the global ecosystems on which humanity depends for its survival. The SDGs, themselves global in nature, are also supposed to act as a framework for specific targets, which take into account the very different capacities and circumstances of 193 UN Member States. This makes developing SDGs an extremely complex task. Although very complex, the process of developing SDGs can build on a number of elements. These include: (1) learning the lessons from the MDGs, (2) making the existing international framework for sustainable development and the MDGs the starting point of the negotiations, (3) adopting “one set of goals”, (4) linking the SDG and MDG processes successfully, and (5) adopting SDGs that are ambitious enough to help address the profound challenges for global development.

2.1 Lessons from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The MDGs have been remarkably successful in focusing attention and mobilising resources to address major gaps in human development. Unlike other international agreements on sustainable development, they have been a central benchmark in measuring crucial aspects of human development and they helped support progress in poverty eradication or increasing primary schooling. This offers a number of **positive lessons** learned: Because the MDGs are clear, limited in number, measureable and based on generally available data, they are easily communicable. This communicability has contributed to the MDGs becoming a central reference point in international development politics and beyond. In this sense, the MDGs have achieved their most important objective. To play an equally important role in the future, the SDGs need to be similarly clear, restricted in number, and – above all – measureable through quantified and time-bound targets and indicators.

The MDGs also offer a number of **negative lessons**. MDGs have been particularly successful in policy areas where progress did not require systematic changes to the economy or society. The MDGs are considered weak on social justice, equity, vulnerability and exclusion. MDG7 on environmental sustainability is particularly weak because it omits crucial issues such as climate change, land degradation, or oceans, while highlighting others, such as drinking water or sanitation, apparently at random. This is a major shortcoming because ever increasing environmental pressures, resource scarcity, and climate change have the potential to undo most development gains. The MDGs only commit developing countries to action, and therefore do not apply to developed countries – except for some targets of MDG 8, which concern international cooperation and ODA. This offers another negative lesson as sustainable development at global level obviously requires commitments from all countries.

2.2 One Set of Goals: The MDGs as a Nucleus for the SDGs

Although the MDGs are not formally endorsed by the UN member states, they are **widely accepted** and have a great deal of political clout. This is a huge feat considering how difficult a global agreement on goals and

targets can be. The political clout of the MDGs means that it would make sense strategically to align the SDG-process with the MDG process, so as to avoid competition between the MDGs and SDGs.

However, this begs the question how such an alignment would look in practice, and to what extent the SDGs should add to and revise the existing MDGs. Analysts have framed this discussion under the headings “MDG plus”, “revised MDGs plus strong SDGs”, “One World goals” or “two-track-approach”. This terminology serves to frame the discussion, but it also carries the inherent risk that general terminology, such as “MDG plus” or “two-track-approach”, carries a lot of political baggage without advancing the debate. Terminology thus easily obscures the fact that in the end, only the precise content of the SDGs matters. For this reason, **concrete and substantive goals should feature centre stage of the discussions**, rather than vague and lofty terminology.

The SDGs and MDGs are closely linked, in process and content. There are various ways to link the MDGs and SDGs but the integration of the two processes to form “**one set of goals**” seems the most sensible choice. One set of goals avoids duplication and potentially conflicting outcomes of the negotiations. The SDGs should contain an integrated set of goals, which strikes an adequate balance between development needs and a high level of environmental protection. Existing MDGs plus a number of concrete proposals for additional sustainability goals should be the starting point of the SDG negotiations. This requires an adjustment of the MDGs to increasing environmental pressures through adding robust sustainability goals, greening existing MDGs and addressing the nexus between the various goals. This is – ultimately – a matter of organising required political support; the current structure of MDGs poses no obstacle *per se* to creating an integrated and ambitious set of goals.

2.3 Merging the MDG and SDG negotiation tracks

The fact that neither of the two negotiation processes on MDGs and SDGs is close to reaching an agreement can also provide an **opportunity for merging them into a single track**: this is easier if none of the processes is close to reaching an agreement on “their” goals and targets. Such a merger should be a genuine interest to governments: SDG and MDG negotiators have – in principle – a strong interest in avoiding conflicting or duplicated goals.

The UN Secretary General has proposed using the special event on the post 2015 MDGs – scheduled for September 2013 – to place the two processes on a “**common track**”. It seems indeed sensible to merge the two processes at the special event. It could be agreed at the special event that a revised SDG working group or other successor body would take forward the negotiations on one set of goals.

2.4 Highlighting the Points of Agreement

Although there are a number of contentious issues, most of them relating to the scope and the level of political ambition that the SDGs should express, political discussions seem to reveal a number of **points of agreement**:

- SDGs will not be legally binding but will constitute a political commitment.
- SDGs – in contrast to the current set of MDGs – would not only commit developing countries but also developed countries.
- SDGs consist of overarching goals, each of which is further specified by a number of targets, which are in turn informed and supported by indicators, i.e. a structure similar to the current MDGs.
- SDGs should focus on goals and targets, rather than engaging in negotiations on enablers or even instruments.

- To be effective, SDGs must be limited in number, based on selected priority areas. They should not try to cover all aspects of sustainable development.

2.5 Meaningful Goals: the Content and Scope of the SDGs

Given the significant political and economic changes that the world has seen since 2000, when the MDGs were adopted, successful SDGs cannot be a simple extension or a minor adjustment of the existing MDGs. Several world regions have achieved rapid and continuous economic growth during this period. This has lifted millions of people out of poverty, but it also presents a new set of challenges. For instance, in many countries, the benefits of growth have been distributed unequally, with most benefits accruing within a small segment of the population. The challenge is to make sure that growth is inclusive, i.e. that incomes rise across all segments of population. Also, the rapid economic growth in parts of the world has coincided with an equally rapid growth in the consumption of energy, natural resources and other material inputs, to the point where the increase in economic welfare – after accounting for the cost of the side-effects of growth, such as environmental degradation – is considerably less than the growth in incomes. It is also clear and agreed that meaningful **SDGs must set priorities** and should not attempt to cover all aspects of sustainable development. If everything is a priority, nothing is a priority. Still, agreeing on priorities is going to be complex, as every issue has fervent advocates.

The SDGs represent an opportunity to reinvigorate the international initiatives and processes for sustainable development – many of which have been dwindling of late – and to provide them with new bearings. To achieve this, the SDGs must **take on the major unsustainable trends** that the world is facing and provide a direction for the transformative challenges ahead – how do economies around the world need to change in order to arrive at a sustainable trajectory, one that does not lead into environmental disaster or social calamity. Without claiming to be exhaustive, challenges such as the following would play a role:

- Decoupling welfare growth from the growth in the consumption of material and natural resources, while ensuring that the benefits of growth are shared equitably;
- Ensuring gender equality, access to education and health care in order to eradicate poverty;
- Securing food supply and soils as indispensable resource of production for a growing - and increasingly affluent - population while preserving ecosystems and biodiversity;
- Providing universal access to modern and sustainable energy services while decreasing global greenhouse gas emissions in line with the globally agreed climate targets, as well as reducing local air pollutants;
- Providing access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation while tackling water scarcity in the face of a changing climate.

3 Introduction

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development - or in short Rio+20 Summit – met in June 2012 and adopted the document “The Future We Want”. The summit agreed, among others, to reform international environmental governance and to prepare options on a strategy for sustainable development financing. The summit also adopted a common understanding of a Green Economy and decided to launch a process to develop a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The **SDG process** began with the establishment of an intergovernmental working group in January 2013 and is supposed to end by 2014 with the adoption of SDGs by the General Assembly.

The SDG process is closely linked to another target-setting process, the **post-2015 development agenda**. This process intends to develop a new set of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), since the current MDGs will expire in 2015. The process on post-2015 MDGs started in September 2010 and is expected to end before the end of 2015.

As the process of developing SDGs has gotten underway and the post-2015 MDGs are being discussed, this **paper intends to frame the discussions on the development of the SDGs**. The paper is not an in-depth survey of the SDGs, but outlines some of the most contentious issues and design choices as a basis for subsequent discussion. It is based on an earlier draft which was discussed at an expert workshop in Berlin on 15 January 2013. In the following, second chapter, the paper outlines the negotiation processes for MDGs and SDGs and their respective challenges. The third chapter presents – in brief – criteria for the development of SDGs. Chapter 4 proposes a structure for the SDGs. Chapter 5 discusses concrete, illustrative proposals for SDGs – areas of priorities and possible content. Chapter 6 draws conclusions.

4 “One Set of Goals”: the Link between SDGs and (future) MDGs

The SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda are closely linked, in content and process. The link between the SDGs, the MDGs and the relevant processes is a key question of negotiating the SDGs. Aware of this close link, the outcome document of the Rio+20 summit states that the SDGs “should be **coherent with and integrated in the United Nations Development Agenda beyond 2015**”.

4.1 The SDG Process

The Rio+20 Summit agreed to start an **inclusive and transparent intergovernmental process on the SDGs**. A 30-member Open Working Group (OWG) of the General Assembly is tasked with preparing a proposal on the SDGs. This open working group was established at the beginning of 2013. The open working group’s work is informed by expert statements and stakeholder participation. Members of the open working group share their seats between countries. The working group has adopted a draft programme of work, which sets out eight sessions in 2013 and 2014.

While the SDG process will be led by governments, the United Nations will also play an important role. The UN Secretary General has made – in consultation with national Governments – the initial input to the work of the open working group. The Secretary General will also establish an inter-agency technical support team and expert panels to provide technical support to the process and to the work of the working group. This technical support team will be established under the umbrella of the United Nations system task team on the post-2015 United Nations development agenda.¹ Progress of work will be reported regularly to the General Assembly.

The intergovernmental open working group is expected to present a report to the General Assembly in the autumn of 2013.

4.2 Millennium Development Goals: Lessons Learned

In September 2000, UN Member States adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration. On the basis of the Millennium Declaration, **eight MDGs** were developed:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger,
- achieve universal primary education,
- promote gender equality and empower women,
- reduce child mortality,
- improve maternal health,
- combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases,
- ensure environmental sustainability, and
- develop a global partnership for development.

¹ “Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit, Accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals: options for sustained and inclusive growth and issues for advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015” Annual report of the Secretary-General, UN GA, 67th sess., (6 August 2012)

These MDGs are further **substantiated through 21 targets and 60 indicators**, whereby each goal is broken down into a number of targets (ranging from one target for MDG 2, 3 and 4 to six targets for MDG 8), and each target is measured through a number of indicators. Targets and indicators were produced by the UNSG in 2001. In 2005, the MDG monitoring process added four new targets and twelve new indicators which member states accepted at the 2005 World Summit.² Although the MDGs are not formally endorsed by the UN member states, they are widely accepted. Periodic reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the MDGs are accepted. This is a huge feat considering how difficult a global agreement on goals and targets can be.³

According to the UN, “enormous progress has been made towards achieving the MDGs. Global poverty continues to decline, more children than ever are attending primary school, child deaths have dropped dramatically, access to safe drinking water has been greatly expanded, and targeted investments in fighting malaria, AIDS and tuberculosis have saved millions.”⁴ The MDGs have also been remarkably successful in focusing attention and mobilising resources to address major gaps in human development.⁵ MDGs have been particularly successful in policy areas where progress did not require systematic changes to the economy or society.

Despite these achievements – which appear by and large uncontested –, there are also a number of criticisms. Implementation of MDGs is uneven, with some MDGs apparently on track and others lagging behind. The MDGs have also been criticised on more fundamental grounds: “as an idea, the MDGs have a limited conceptual basis for defining development/progress/change; as a set of indicators, the MDGs have numerous limitations on measuring development/progress/change; and as an institutional/incentive/accountability structure, the impact of the MDGs at country level is uneven at best”.⁶ MDG7 on environmental sustainability has been criticised as incomplete, omitting crucial issues such as climate change, land degradation or oceans, while highlighting others, such as drinking water or sanitation, apparently at random.⁷ Another criticism is that the MDGs only commit developing countries to action, but do as such not apply to developed countries – except for some targets of MDG 8, which concern international cooperation and ODA. The following table provides an overview of strengths and weaknesses of the MDGs:⁸

2 2005 World Summit Outcome, GA Res. 60/1, UN GA, 60th sess., UN doc. A/RES/60/1 (2005)

3 McArthur, John J. (2012) “Rethinking Global Development Goals.” Stanford Social Innovation Review: 19-20, URL: http://www.ssireview.org/pdf/Fall_2012_Rethinking_Global_Development_Goals.pdf

4 “Beyond 2015.” United Nations Millennium Development Goals. United Nations, 2012, URL: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/beyond2015.shtml>

5 Bates-Eamer, Nicole et al. (2012): “Post-2015 Development Agenda: Goals, Targets and Indicators” CIGI Special Report, URL: http://www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/MDG_Post_2015v3.pdf

6 Sumner, D. and Tiwari, M. (2012): “Global poverty reduction to 2015 and beyond: What has been the impact of the MDG and what are the options for a post-2015 Global Framework?”, URL: http://www.chronicpoverty.org/uploads/publication_files/sumner_tiwari_mdgs.pdf

7 Evans, Alex (2012): Climate, Scarcity and Sustainability in the Post-2015 Development Agenda (November 2012)

8 Sumner (2012)

Table 1. MDG Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very strong impact on international discussions and negotiations, in particular the international poverty discourse; • Strong impact on public awareness; • Good communication tool; • A common/shared understanding of poverty reduction for a wide range of stakeholders; • Measureable, clear and achievable targets and indicators; • Pressure to improve data; • ODA mobilisation, in particular to health and education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited unifying rationale on the structural causes of poverty; • Weak on social justice, equity, vulnerability, sustainability and exclusion; • Strong donor-led; • Impacts at country level mixed; • Encouraged vertical funds at the expense of national approaches; • Little buy-in from developing countries; • Neglecting the very poorest; • MDG 7 on the environment particular weak.

4.3 Post 2015 MDG process

As the MDGs will expire in 2015, the UN has started the so-called **post-2015 development agenda** process. This process is already under way. In September 2010, the High-level Plenary Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on the progress towards the Millennium Development Goals requested the UN Secretary-General to make recommendations to advance the UN post-2015 development agenda.⁹

Following the preparatory work of the UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda¹⁰, the UN General Secretary established a **High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda** which delivered its final report on 30 May 2013.¹¹ This report will be used to inform the Special Event, scheduled in September 2013 to follow up the efforts made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, during which the possible form of the Post-2015 Development Agenda will be discussed. The delivery of this report was the final action of the HLP. It has not yet been established which institution will take over the leadership of the MDG process.

The Secretary General has suggested that the special event could provide the basis for subsequent decision-making on the characteristics and content of the post-2015 development agenda. The event could also call for a road map for a high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly in 2015 aimed at reaching agreement on this agenda. The Secretary General has also proposed to assign an inter-agency expert group, with guidance from the Statistical Commission, with the development of indicators and the technical aspects of target-setting, similar to the development of the MDG framework.¹²

UN (2012): UN System Task Team to support the preparation of the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, Draft Concept Note, 6 January 2012, URL:

http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/concept_note.pdf

9 Keeping the promise: united to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, GA Res. 65/1, UN GA, 65th Sess., UN doc. A/RES/65/1 (2010)

10 Set up by the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs in September 2011, the Task Team was composed of “dedicated senior technical experts to coordinate system-wide preparations on on-going efforts and propose a unified vision and road map for the definition of a UN development agenda post-2015, in consultation with all stakeholders.” The Task Team produced a report which led to the establishment of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

11 UN High-level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (HLP): “A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development”

12 Annual report of the Secretary-General (6 August 2012)

Concerning content, the Secretary General has suggested that – in addition to maintaining a clear focus on human development – the **post-2015 development agenda will have to address other emerging or pressing challenges**, such as increasing environmental footprint, increasing disaster risks, rising inequalities, continuing violent conflict, rapid demographic change, rapid urbanisation or continuous migration flows. Food and nutrition security, water and sanitation, energy, and access to quality health services (including reproductive health), education and vocational training are also of crucial importance, according to the Secretary General.¹³ Along similar lines, the High Level Panel has recommended a post-2015 framework that pursues five “key transformations”: leave no one behind; put sustainable development at the core; transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth; build peace and effective, open and accountable public institutions; and forge a new global partnership.¹⁴

4.4 Link between SDGs and MDGs

The SDGs and MDGs, including the post 2015 MDG debate, are closely linked in content and process. Recognising the close relationship between the SDGs and MDGs the **Rio + 20 Summit** stated SDGs should be “coherent with *and integrated into* the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015”. The summit also noted that the development of SDGs should not divert focus or effort from the achievement of the MDGs and that the SDG process needs to be coordinated and coherent with the post-2015 development agenda.

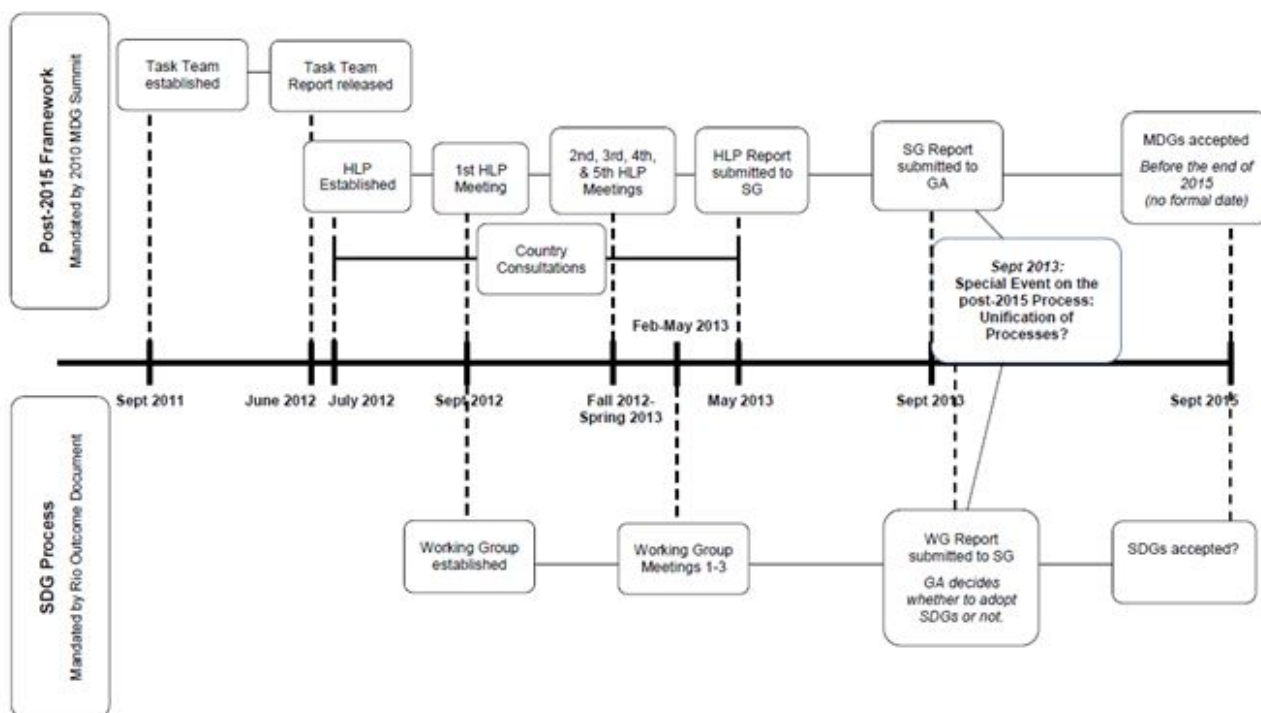
The **wording of the Rio +20 outcome document** could suggest that there is clear relationship between the MDGs and SDGs, whereby the SDGs will be integrated into the post 2015 development agenda. In this reading, the SDGs would (only) constitute one component – out of many – of the post 2015 MDGs. The wording of the outcome document could, however, also mean that the SDGs and MDGs should be coherent and mainstreamed, i.e. MDGs and SDGs should not be contradicting but complementary. The outcome document avoided the stronger term “incorporated”, leaving room for other arrangements.

The post 2015 MDG and SDGs negotiations are also closely related because of **their parallel processes**. The post-2015 development discussions have formally started in September 2010, and are under way with the establishment of the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda in July 2012, although no formal negotiations have started. The SDG process is not as advanced in content but the negotiations of the intergovernmental working group have begun in earnest, the first indispensable step in the negotiations.

13 Annual report of the Secretary-General (6 August 2012)

14 <http://post2015.iisd.org/news/in-final-report-hlp-calls-for-eradicating-extreme-poverty-in-context-of-sustainable-development/>

Fig. 1. Post-2015 and SDG processes (Ecologic Institute on the basis of UN Task Team¹⁵)



The Secretary General has suggested converging the two processes through the guidance and decisions of the General Assembly. More concretely, the Secretary General proposed that the special event on the post-2015 MDGs –scheduled for the third quarter of 2013 – could “place the two processes on a common track, with a view to making a determination regarding the post-2015 United Nations development agenda, including sustainable development goals”.¹⁶ Furthermore, regional, national and thematic consultations on the post-2015 or simultaneous consultations on SDGs goals or close interaction at the level of the Secretariat could be used to merge the processes.¹⁷

The integration of the two processes to form “one set of goals” is indeed a sensible choice. It would avoid duplication and potentially conflicting outcomes of the negotiations (see below, chapter 5). However, **the practical challenges of integrating the two tracks should not be underestimated, especially given their lack of synchronicity.** For the post 2015 MDG process, the special event in September 2013 would mark the culmination of a three-year consultation process that started in September 2010. For the SDG process, it

comes only less than a year after the establishment of the negotiation process. This leaves only months to arrive at a common understanding on what SDGs should entail. As important players have not positioned themselves, the timeframe has become very tight.

¹⁵ http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/concept_note.pdf

¹⁶ Annual report of the Secretary-General (6 August 2012)

¹⁷ Annual report of the Secretary-General (6 August 2012)

Despite these challenges, there could be a **window of opportunity in autumn 2013 to merge the processes**:

- The different stages could provide an opportunity for establishing one negotiation track because merging the processes is easier if none of the processes is close to reaching an agreement on “their” goals and targets.
- the MDG Gap Task Force will have presented its 2013 report,
- the report of the High-Level Panels and the Secretary General’s report on the Post-2015 development agenda is available,
- the intergovernmental working group will probably present its first interim report,
- the High-level Political Forum, the successor of the CSD, will have met for the first time in fall 2013.¹⁸

¹⁸ Marianne Beisheim, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin (18.01.2013); Marianne Beisheim: Globale Ziele für nachhaltige Entwicklung, SWP-Aktuell 2012/A57

5 Criteria for the Development and Selection of SDGs

Criteria for the preparation of the SDGs are at centre stage for the development and negotiations. The **Rio+20 summit has taken up the issue of criteria and agreed – in general terms – on a number of criteria.** The Outcome Document states that the SDGs must be communicable, action orientated, and universally applicable, all without leaving the circumstances of individual countries unconsidered. Think tanks and other actors have also started discussing criteria for the selection of the SDGs as well as post-2015 MDG criteria. Combining these discussions, the following criteria are likely to play a central role in developing SDGs and – to some extent – post-2015 MDGs:

1. **Understandable and communicable but nonetheless sufficiently complex:** In general terms, the MDGs are clear, limited in number, measureable and based on generally available data. All of these features allowed them to be easily communicable. This communicability has contributed to the MDGs becoming a central reference point in international development politics and beyond. To play an equally important role in the future, the SDGs need to be similarly clear and restricted in number, as foreseen in the Outcome Document.
2. **Aspirational and action oriented:** The Outcome Document highlights that the SDGs should be *aspirational* and *action oriented*. This vague formulation must be narrowed down, and—in an ideal situation—science should play a central role in determining the level of ambition.
3. **Measurable, verifiable, and reliable:** The Outcome Document does not explicitly require that the SDGs are measurable (the word does not appear in the text). The Outcome Document, however, recognises that progress towards stated goals must be measured using indicators and targets.
4. **Existing international frameworks for sustainable development:** Several different sustainability goals have already been agreed upon at an international level. Some of these are of a political nature, such as the Agenda 21, the decisions made in Johannesburg, or the results of international summits. Agreements can also be legally binding, as in the case of international environmental law. The drafting of the SDGs must—according to the Outcome Document—consider these frameworks. Crucially, the formulation of SDGs has to anticipate and consider the core elements of the post-2015 development agenda, in particular the MDGs.
5. **Global and universally applicable without ignoring national contexts:** A particular challenge involves formulating goals that are globally relevant but also respect specific national contexts and priorities, as they should apply not only to developing countries but also to industrialized countries. This has also sparked discussions whether the SDGs should address truly *global* problems (i.e. common and shared planetary issues that affect all mankind, e.g. climate change, biodiversity or marine litter), or *universal* problems (i.e. issues that all countries face, but each in their own way, e.g. gender equality or air quality). Discussions of the SDGs will be characterised by the tension between the global aspirations and the capabilities and priorities of individual nations. The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) will play an important role here.
6. **Avoid duplication with other processes?** In a narrow interpretation, an efficient system of global sustainable goals would seek to avoid duplication of other processes, such as international climate change negotiations. However, while this clearly is sensible in principle, it is hard to confine SDGs to those areas that are not covered elsewhere – at least to some extent. Ignoring issues such as climate change, biodiversity or access to sustainable energy, which are (rightly) perceived as *the* central challenges for environmental sustainability, and confining the scope of the SDGs to residual

issues, would make it very difficult to communicate the value of having SDGs, and would effectively sideline them. A wider interpretation is therefore that SDGs should focus on those issues and processes where they can add value, i.e. by giving renewed momentum to an otherwise deadlocked process.

7. **Megatrends:** It is important to bear in mind the megatrends - such as population growth, urbanisation, globalisation, climate change and environmental degradation - that will shape the context for achieving the SDGs.¹⁹ In this context, climate change is a special case - it is both a pressure that exacerbates the challenges faced in other areas, and which needs to be managed (e.g. impacts on agriculture, food and water supply, biodiversity), and at the same time limiting climate change itself is one of the key challenges that humanity faces. In the words of H.-J. Schellnhuber, society needs to control the unavoidable, and avoid the uncontrollable.

Obviously, there are various tensions between these criteria – reconciling required levels of ambition and political feasibility, simplicity and complexity, communicability and interconnectedness is a considerable challenge. **Tradeoffs and compromises will be required**, even at the stage of criteria, although political will and power will ultimately determine the scope, content and level of ambition of the SDGs, not criteria.

¹⁹ See, for example, KPMG: Expect the Unexpected: Building business value in a changing world, kpmg.com, <http://www.kpmg.com/global/en/issuesandinsights/articlespublications/pages/building-business-value.aspx>

6 Development of SDGs

Since the adoption of the MDGs in 2000, the world has changed significantly. Over the last decade, a number of issues have become more urgent or have newly emerged, while others have lost significance. The financial and economic crisis has had a profound and immediate impact on developed and developing countries. With ever increasing greenhouse gas emissions, climate change has the potential to undo many – if not most – development gains. Demographic change and urbanisation have continued to advance over the last decade. In 2000, most of the world’s poor people lived in low-income countries; today more poor people live in middle-income countries. The rise of the G20 and its institutionalisation marks another fundamental shift from the year 2000 when the OECD countries were still the primary drivers and decision makers in global economic affairs.²⁰ The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 have had a profound impact on international cooperation. These shifts have led to fundamental changes in the development context in the course of just one decade.

Successful SDGs must provide answers to these (new) challenges; they cannot be a simple extension or minor adjustment of the existing MDGs. They must be well structured, focus on a limited number of the most important priorities, and express a sufficient level of political ambition. The following section discusses what SDGs could look like: first in terms of their structure, and second by exploring options for the possible content of the SDGs.

6.1 Structure of the SDGs

SDGs have to address – at least – **six structural issues**: (1) the relationship between SDGs and MDGs, (2) the link between global goals and action at the national level, (3) their internal structure, (4) the link between objectives and means, (5) their legal weight and (6) their geographical scope. While the first four issues remain the subject of negotiation, the last two aspects are generally agreed: It is widely accepted that SDGs will not be legally binding but will constitute a political commitment. It is agreed in paragraph 247 of the Rio outcome document that SDGs – in contrast to most MDGs – would not only commit developing countries but also developed countries.

6.1.1 One Set of Goals: the Link between SDGs and MDGs

Having “one set of goals” has been a central demand – the Secretary General, the EU and other actors have called for one set of goals. One set of goals means that the aspects of human development, social and economic development and environmental sustainability are **integrated in one new set of goals**. The notion “one set of goals”, however, says nothing about the content and scope of an individual set of goals and is equally silent on the weighting of social, economic and environmental aspects. Although there is agreement – at least in principle terms – that SDGs should contain an **integrated set of goals**, which addresses all three dimensions of sustainable development, it is a key question to what extent SDGs should be built on the existing MDGs. Analysts have put forward different ways of framing this discussion, including the following options:²¹

²⁰ Sumner (2012)

²¹ see e.g. Sumner 2012, Evans 2012

- **MDG-Plus:** This approach takes a small set of three or four ‘core’ universal goals such as poverty eradication, child education, health and nutrition, plus a small set of three or four new locally defined goals, which may (or may not) extend beyond a human development focus. In this case, it is unlikely that the environmental dimension of the MDGs is strengthened, as it would maintain the current setting, where poverty eradication features centre stage and long-term development consideration are sidelined.
- **Integrated goals:** This approach takes the current MDGs as a starting point, but revises them to include all three dimensions of sustainable development as part of each MDG. This includes a strong environmental component, focusing on issues like resilience, protection of ecosystem health and ecosystem services, and ensuring stewardship for global public goods.
- **Economic development within planetary boundaries:** This approach defines development goals in a narrow sense of socio-economic progress and poverty eradication, but places these development goals in the context of a finite environmental space, defined by planetary boundaries that must not be constantly transgressed.²² While this approach represents “one set of goals” in the sense of combining development and environmental limits under one roof, the different dimensions of sustainable development are not integrated into the same goal(s), but are addressed in separate goals. The main difference to the first scenario (MDG-Plus) is that, in this case, the planetary boundaries represent an absolute limit for economic growth.

While it can be useful to frame the discussion under these or similar headings, there is also an **inherent danger**: generic terminology, such as “MDG plus”, carries a lot of political baggage without advancing the debate; this generic terminology easily obscures the fact that in the end only the exact content of the SDGs matters. With this caveat in mind, the following chart compares these options:

²² Raworth 2012, Rockström et al. 2009, SRU 2012

Table 2. Options for integrating MDGs and SDGs

	Strengths	Weaknesses
MDG plus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively high political feasibility • Builds on existing agreements • Builds on thoroughly analysed and proven framework • Smallest common denominator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy focus on poverty eradication, possibly at the expense of environmental protection • Confirms and thereby deepens current structural shortcomings in the world economy and political systems • Risk of lacking the required ambition
Integrated goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political feasibility moderate • Builds on existing agreements • Builds on thoroughly analysed and proven framework • Avoids heavy focus on poverty eradication • Contains more balanced development path which takes account of future generation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of lacking the required ambition
Poverty eradication and respect for planetary boundaries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potentially high level of environmental ambition • Structural innovation • Establishes a scientifically informed boundary and could communicate well the implications of overstepping this boundary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political feasibility low • Incompatible with current MDG structure which works largely at household-level • Not all of the planetary boundaries apply at global level: climate change, ocean acidification or ozone depletion are global issues unlike fresh water depletion or land use change.

6.1.2 Link between Global Goals and Action at National Level

Many sustainability indicator sets have struggled to **reconcile global action and national circumstances**. The choice was often to either build country-specific indicators and/or targets that take their contexts into account or to apply a one-size-fits-all approach that uses the same metrics and/or targets for all countries. One example to strike a balance between the two could be given by climate change, where the global goal would be to limit warming to 2°C but the distribution of efforts (or assigned emission amounts in the Kyoto Protocol framework) is based on formula that takes country circumstances into account.

A **pledge and review process** could help address the dilemma of global target requirements and widely varied national circumstances.²³ Under such a process, countries would pledge – on a voluntary basis and in light of globally agreed goals – what they could contribute to meeting the globally agreed goals, given their specific capacities and circumstances.²⁴ These pledges would be reviewed by an independent body, possibly the UN, in a transparent, participatory and credible process. The review could confirm pledges or recommend adjustments. Once pledges have been agreed, periodic reviews could follow-up progress. Yet, while such process could address the dilemma of global goals in a very diverse world, they carry the risk that the most difficult decisions – how to achieve a fair distribution of efforts and contributions – are merely postponed. Experiences with such process are at best mixed and have not resulted in an adequate level of commitments. The political feasibility of agreeing on a pledge-and-review solution may be high, but the real crunch only comes about when it is time to review (and revise) the pledges made.

²³ Marianne Beisheim: Globale Ziele für nachhaltige Entwicklung, SWP-Aktuell 2012/A57

²⁴ The bottom-up process could be more structured if countries drew their targets and indicators from previously agreed baskets, thus allowing for some freedom while also providing for coherence (see Rivera: Towards Sustainable Development Goals: Essential Criteria. January 2013.

As another option, **country groups** could commit to specific goals and timeframes that take into account their national circumstances and capacities. While this approach is – in principle – an option to address the dilemma of global goals and diverse national circumstances, the biggest problem is that of adequately grouping countries. There are a number of criteria that can be invoked to form country groups – such as the geographic location; level of economic development, level of human development; social, cultural, or political factors; and historic performance in terms of economic development or environmental degradation. As exemplified in the Annex-I / Non-Annex-I-divide in the UNFCCC negotiations, the membership in either country group may come to be seen as (politically or economically) advantageous, and may, therefore, be hard-fought. To complicate things further, a country's performance in most of these factors will change over time, which might make a re-grouping necessary. While this should not be taken to suggest that grouping countries is fundamentally unfeasible, it serves as a reminder that political leadership and commitment will be necessary to arrive at a workable outcome.

6.1.3 Internal Structure of the SDGs

Regarding the structure of the SDGs, the **Rio +20 summit suggests a structure with overarching goals, targets and indicators**, i.e. similar to the current MDGs. The outcome document of the summit states “that progress towards the achievement of the goals [SDGs] needs to be assessed and accompanied by targets and indicators, while taking into account different national circumstances, capacities and levels of development”.

This **internal structure for the SDGs is widely accepted**. It is also agreed that measurability – which essentially requires goals with time-bound and quantifiable targets and indicators – will be essential if the SDGs are to effectively guide policy. Without time-bound and quantified targets and indicators, goals remain purely aspirational and progress cannot be measured.²⁵ For this reason, the SDGs should be defined as overarching goals, while leaving the actual measurement to indicators. This would allow the SDGs to be easily communicable while leaving the scientific and technical details to the indicators. The internal structure of goals, targets and indicators is – at least in principle – the least contested structural issue of the SDGs, although the availability of reliable and comparable data will remain a great challenge.

6.1.4 Link between Objectives and Means

Some stakeholders have criticised the MDGs for omitting a focus on implementation. There have been proposals to include “enablers” into new goals. The EU has proposed means of implementation. However, the SDGs are clearly **not a programme of a world government**, but simply a framework that leaves the implementation or decisions on instruments to other institutions, notably governments and parliaments. The already complicated SDG negotiations should not be overburdened with discussions on enablers or implementation requirements, let alone negotiations on instruments.

²⁵ Bates-Eamer et al. (2012), see also Vandemoortele, J.: Taking the MDGs beyond 2015: Hasten Slowly (May 2009)

7 Content of the SDGs

7.1 Priority Areas defined by the Rio+20 Conference

The Rio+20 conference made attempts to define the priority areas of the SDGs. First, the conference stated that SDGs will build on the Agenda 21, the decisions made in Johannesburg, other relevant existing commitments and results of international summits. Second, the conference set out these 26 priority areas:

Poverty eradication	Oceans and seas	Biodiversity
Food security and nutrition and sustainable agriculture	Least developed countries	Desertification, land degradation and drought
Water and sanitation	Landlocked developing countries	Promoting full and productive employment, decent work for all and social protection
Mountains	Small island developing states	Energy
Africa	Chemicals and waste	Sustainable tourism
Regional efforts	Sustainable consumption and production	Sustainable transport
Disaster risk reduction	Mining	Sustainable cities and human settlements
Climate change	Education	Health and population
Forests	Gender equality and women's empowerment	

By defining no less than 26 priorities, the **summit effectively avoided the decision on priorities**: the 26 priority areas together constitute a very broad and diverse array of different challenges and policy areas, without a clear structure or rationale. Proposed priority areas address thematic issues such as energy, biodiversity or health, specific industries and sectors (such as mining, transport and tourism), but also regional aspects such as Africa, landlocked developing countries or least developed countries. As a consequence, the list of priorities appears somewhat eclectic (if not random), reflecting particular preferences for certain topics rather than following some overarching structure.

Concerning the **post-2015 development agenda**, observers expect that the post-2015 agenda will likely include, in some form, the dimensions of peace and security, civil and political rights, disaster resilience, connectivity (i.e. access to energy, transportation and communication services) and governance. It will probably highlight inequality, improving food security and some reference to safe water and sanitation, the informal economy, and the transition to a “green economy.”²⁶ Others have pointed out that the post-2015 development agenda has to address three major challenges: first, to see to the unfinished business of the “old” MDGs that were not achieved until 2015, including issues of poverty eradication, health or gender equality; secondly, to establish a new model of economic welfare and societal well-being that appeals to both North and South, and which better reflects the social and environmental dimensions and the conditions they impose on economic development; and thirdly, to implement an effective regime for global stewardship of common resources and global public goods.²⁷

²⁶ Bates-Eamer et al. (2012)

²⁷ Dirk Messner, DIE, contribution at the 61. Berliner Fachgespräch zur Globalisierung, Berlin, 17 January 2013

7.2 Examples of possible SDGs

The following examples of SDGs do not attempt to provide and should not be read as a complete, coherent, and exhaustive set of SDGs that covers the entire range of issues and problems that different constituencies and stakeholder groups have raised in the discussions. Rather, **the following examples of SDGs are intended to illustrate what SDGs could look like**, and in particular how key environmental considerations could feature in the SDGs. Also, expecting that only the goals will be agreed globally, but that the associated targets and indicators will most likely be defined nationally (see chapter 4.1.2), the following examples should be understood as a catalogue of issues, which can be further translated into concrete targets.

The illustrative SDGs are based on the criteria discussed above (chapter 3). They are conceived as a set of integrated goals, whereby each of the goals reflects all three dimensions of sustainable development.

The illustrative SDGs build on existing goals and targets (in particular the MDGs and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation), on the priority areas of the Rio Outcome Document, and on a survey of 63 countries conducted by the UN Secretary-General.²⁸ They also draw on proposals for SDGs that have been put forward in the run-up to the Rio-Conference, including the Concept Note on Sustainable Development Goals submitted by the governments of Colombia, Peru, and United Arab Emirates, the decisions of the informal meeting of the EU environment ministers in Horsens, Denmark, on 18 and 19 April 2012, and proposals put forward by stakeholders and academia (e.g. Raworth 2012, PBL 2012, see also Lingán 2012 for a summary and survey).

The sum of the various goals and targets from these different documents does not form a coherent whole: to begin with, many documents do not specify the goals and targets in any detail, but rather provide a list of issues that should be addressed, listing these as headline terms or general labels. In order to structure this broad range of different goals and targets and to arrive at a manageable number of meaningful SDGs, a selection of the various issues were subsequently grouped into **six clusters**:

- a) land use and land-based ecosystems;
- b) oceans and marine ecosystems;
- c) urbanisation;
- d) materials and industry;
- e) welfare and equity;
- f) energy and climate.

These clusters are merely a way of structuring the broad range of issues by combining issues that are interrelated – e.g. because they address the same actors (as in the case of materials and industry), because there is an overlap between the different targets and therefore possible synergies (as in energy and climate). They do not claim to be the only (or the best) solution to this problem; indeed, as discussed below, options for several other clusters were considered but eventually disregarded. **The six clusters do offer the benefit of arranging many of the most important issues into an accessible form**, the potential SDGs that could be derived for the clusters satisfy the criteria outlined in chapter 3 above. In this sense, they are not to be understood as a recommendation of what SDGs should look like, but rather as an illustration what SDGs could look like.

²⁸ UN Secretary General: Secretary-General's Initial Input to the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, 12 December 2012

The broad range of issues also includes several **cross-cutting issues** that are key to any notion of sustainable development, and which are expected to feature prominently in the post-2015 development agenda, i.e. poverty eradication, education, peace and security, gender equality, health, or good governance. While there are multiple linkages between the SDG clusters and these cross-cutting issues, it is not possible to attribute the cross-cutting issues to any particular of the clusters described below. For instance, education, good governance, or gender equality are clearly relevant for all the clusters. Most, if not all of the clusters, have implications for poverty eradication, with particularly strong links for the economic welfare, land use, oceans, and energy clusters. Issues of climate change and land use, and to some degree oceans, clearly have implications for peace and security from conflict.²⁹

In the following, specific SDGs are outlined for the different clusters. Further possible SDGs which were considered but eventually disregarded – including the WEF nexus – are briefly discussed below.

7.2.1 SDG on land use: Achieve sustainable use of land and land-based ecosystems

Rationale: The SDG combines different environmental and social issues that revolve around land use practices and terrestrial ecosystems. It aims to balance human needs (food) and land uses (agriculture) with the protection of land-based ecosystems (soil, biodiversity) and the services they provide.

Possible targets:

- Enhance long-term food security (eradicate hunger now and forever, ensure stable and sufficient food supply – possibly also reducing food waste, dietary change);
- Sustainable agriculture (access of smallholder farmers to agricultural land (Horsens); increase of global agricultural productivity, based on sustainable agriculture (Horsens))
- Protect soils and strive for a land-degradation neutral world (Rio outcome document)
- Slowing the rate of / halting biodiversity loss (ex-MDG 7B, CBD target)

Link to the post-2015 development agenda: The targets on food security and sustainable agriculture would directly link to poverty eradication and nutrition, which are expected to feature as core issues on the post-2015 development agenda.

Strengths: With food security, soil degradation and biodiversity loss, the goal combines some of the large and unresolved challenges that need to be addressed for any type of development to be sustainable. The targets are mostly based on well-established policy processes and can often build on existing targets – more so for food security and biodiversity, less so for soil protection and sustainable agriculture,

Weaknesses: It is not guaranteed that the different targets are mutually supportive – in fact, the targets of food security on the one hand and biodiversity / soil protection on the other may be seen as conflicting targets. They can be reconciled depending on the type of agriculture that is practiced; therefore the sustainable agriculture target is key to reconciling them.

²⁹ The clustering does not include human rights explicitly – while of course issues such as poverty eradication, good governance or peace and security, but also access to energy, food security and access to sanitation can be relevant for human rights. However, human rights are already covered in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the various UN human rights treaties plus a great number of regional regimes, which are all legally binding. For this reason, there would be limited added value by reiterating them as part of the SDGs. Human rights related SDG risk to duplicate or even contradict existing agreements.

Options: The SDG could be extended to include a further target on freshwater use, given that freshwater ecosystems also count towards land-based ecosystems, and are important for terrestrial biodiversity. A drawback of this approach is that water-related targets would be found in three different clusters: a target on freshwater ecosystems in the land-use cluster, a target on marine ecosystems in the oceans cluster, and a target on drinking water and sanitation in the urbanisation cluster.

7.2.2 SDG on oceans: Preserve the health of marine ecosystems and maintain their capacity to provide ecosystem services and sustain human livelihoods

Rationale: The protection of marine ecosystems is of high relevance for sustainable development on different grounds. For one thing, marine and coastal ecosystems are a source of food and income, and it is especially the poorest parts of the population that directly depend on these ecosystems and the services they provide. The protection of marine and coastal ecosystems, therefore, has a direct impact on poverty, nutrition, jobs and human development of this part of the population. The protection of marine ecosystems is also justified given their character as a global public good, also seeing that the existing regulatory framework has not been sufficient to end overfishing and ensure an effective, sustainable management of fish stocks. An SDG to protect marine ecosystems would take up principle 7 of the 1992 Rio Declaration, which calls upon countries to “conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem“.

Possible targets:

- Protect marine and coastal ecosystems and preserve marine biodiversity (Horsens, CBD Aichi target),
- Reduce marine litter (Horsens),
- Eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (Horsens, Johannesburg Plan of Implementation),
- Ensure an equitable share of fish resources for those dependent on fish for food security (Horsens)

Link to the post-2015 development agenda: Given the dependence of the poorest parts of population on marine and coastal ecosystems for sustaining their livelihoods, there are direct links to issues such as nutrition and poverty eradication. A more indirect linkage to issues of peace and human security can also be argued, given that the degradation of ecosystems is also increasingly seen as a factor contributing to conflicts and to forced migration.

Strengths: The goal has a clear focus: it addresses an area where the existing set of multilateral agreements and regulation is not adequate to reverse the current, unsustainable trends, and which was, therefore, also flagged up as a priority area in the run-up to the Rio+20 conference. Sustainable management of the global fish stocks, and protection of oceans from litter, are exemplary cases of global commons that require international cooperation and global stewardship. Acknowledging and protecting the right to fish resources as a source of nutrition for those depending on it stresses the social dimension and establishes a clear link to the poverty eradication agenda.

Weaknesses: On a sceptical note, it could be argued that marine ecosystems do not suffer from a shortage of targets for their protection, but rather a failure to follow up on the targets that already exist.

7.2.3 SDG on urbanisation: Promote sustainable and resilient cities

Rationale: The SDG relates to urbanisation as one of the major global trends that will shape the 21st century. It addresses the different social, environmental and economic challenges that arise from the urbanisation trend, with a view to shaping the process of urbanisation in a sustainable way.

Possible targets:

- Target on access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation (Target 10 / MDG 7)
- Target on urban air pollution and associated respiratory diseases
- Target on living conditions of slum dwellers (Target 11 / MDG 7)
- Target on improved integrated planning (Colombia/Peru/UAE note)
- Other possible targets: sustainable housing, transport services, urban green spaces, urban sprawl

Link to the post-2015 development agenda: Urbanisation is already addressed in the current MDG 7 (target 11), which calls for significant improvements in the lives of 100 million slum dwellers; likewise, target 10 in the same MDG 7 addresses the access to drinking water and sanitation. Indeed, all of the above targets are related to human health and well-being. Other dimensions that are affected by the trend towards urbanisation are participation / effective local governance (since administration and governance structures often will not cope with rapid urbanisation, especially where urban dwellers live in informal settlements), as well as decent jobs, given that labour-induced migration is a main driver of urbanisation.

Strengths: The SDG is clearly relevant, addressing a set of issues that is already affecting a large share of the world population, which will continue to grow in relevance over the coming decades, and which is so far not adequately addressed in the MDGs. The issue of sustainable urban development also has multiple links to, and integrates well with the current set of MDGs and the topics of the post-2015 development agenda. At the same time, focusing efforts around the topic of sustainable urban development would provide a more consistent goal than the current MDG 7 – which supposedly addresses on the much broader notion of environmental sustainability, even though in fact some of its targets focus on the narrower issue of urbanisation.

Weaknesses: First, while urbanisation is a global trend, the answers and solutions are always local. While there is much scope for exchange and learning, it is arguable whether issues that are dealt with through regional planning and zoning are in fact suitable for a global goal – the challenge of sustainable urbanisation may be a universal challenge, but it is not a global problem. Second, although decreasing in relative terms, rural population remains a very significant part of the global population. Also, while the issues of access to basic sanitation and energy services are as pressing in rural as they are in urban areas, they may require different approaches and solutions in both settings.

7.2.4 SDG on materials and industry: Towards sustainable industries – addressing the material basis of the economy

Rationale: The goal builds on elements of the broader SCP agenda, and focuses efforts on the physical basis of the economy, i.e. consumption of raw materials, disposal of waste, and the management of chemicals as a particularly problematic material stream. The SDG addresses industrial sectors that are key for a greening of the global economy (waste, chemicals), and for which there are manifold global interlinkages, and, therefore, a need for concerted global action.

Possible targets:

- Target on resource efficiency: reduction of material throughput both nationally and internationally, management of natural resources over their life-cycle to reach an absolute decoupling of economic growth from natural resource use (domestic material consumption) (Horsens) on the one hand and total material input of domestic production from job creation on the other hand

- Target on waste: implement a circular economy, avoiding waste wherever possible through re-use and less material-intensive production, recycling of waste that cannot be avoided, and energy recovery from waste that cannot be recycled. Reduce landfilling of waste (Horsens)
- Target on chemicals management: ensure the sound management of chemicals throughout their life cycle, so that chemicals are used and produced in ways that minimise adverse effects on human health and the environment (Horsens)

Link to the post-2015 development agenda: On a global scale, resource consumption is often physically separated from the extraction / production of resources and the associated impacts, and also from the disposal of waste. The global scramble for resources and the unregulated disposal of wastes are already affecting the lives and the livelihoods of millions, often the poorest parts of the population. Reducing the global consumption of resources and the amount of waste generated and improved management of critical material / waste streams, can help to relieve some of the tensions around resource scarcity and problems of waste disposal.

Strengths: There is a compelling case that environmental or social regulation of industries should be coordinated at the global level, to avoid competitive distortions and a “race to the bottom” of lowering standards, but also to ensure that reductions in resource consumption in one country are not immediately offset by an equal increase in another country. At the same time, SDGs are neither the right place nor the right mechanism to coordinate actual regulation of particular industries, but can merely identify priorities for action. The fact that the targets above are organised around the physical dimension of the economy, adhering to the model of a dematerialised or resource-light economy, gives some structure to the SDG.

Weaknesses: Reducing (or even constraining) material consumption will create winners and losers in the countries that depend on resource extraction. While many will benefit from the avoided impacts of resource extraction, limiting resource extraction will also imply income losses and a need for economic restructuring in resource-rich countries. As the history of negotiations under the international climate regime has shown, the countries and non-state actors that would stand to lose from lower resource extraction will, therefore, object to any such move. Though resource-rich countries also might in total benefit from a greater diversification of their economies (provided the necessary skills are available or can be built up by education), this does not take away the fact that there are large and powerful vested interests associated with extractive industries, which need to be convinced or accommodated.

Options: the SDG could be aligned more closely with the SCP agenda, and here, particularly, the Ten-Year-Framework of Programmes on SCP (10 YFP). The alignment could also mean that this goal is established explicitly as an SDG on sustainable consumption and production. The drawback is that SDG, in this case, would not extend beyond existing targets and commitments (as laid out in the 10 YFP), but would merely reiterate them.

7.2.5 SDG on welfare and equity: Achieving sustainable economic welfare

Rationale: Over the last two decades, many countries have experienced rapid economic growth, which has helped to lift hundreds of millions out of poverty. But as economies progress, it also becomes more and more evident that the growth in economic output (as measured by GDP) is an inadequate measure of economic welfare and societal well-being. To begin with, GDP only measures aggregate incomes, but does not reflect the distribution of incomes; neither does it ask how the income has been generated, and whether the economic activity that is measured has actually improved human welfare. The proposed SDG, therefore, includes several targets, which taken together give a more complete picture of economic welfare.

Possible targets:

- Promote sustainable consumption and production patterns through adequate policies and measures, including improved eco-efficiency, clean production, and reducing the environmental and health impacts of products over their life cycle (JPoI)
- Achieve greater social equity, including gender equality, – reduce income disparities and tackle social exclusion to foster more inclusive growth
- Promote macroeconomic stability / reduce economic volatility and tackle macroeconomic imbalances
- Generate employment / promote green and decent jobs
- Phase out environmentally harmful subsidies, in particular for fossil fuels (Horsens, G20)

Link to the post-2015 development agenda: One criticism that has been raised about the current set of MDGs is their narrow focus on income poverty, ignoring other aspects of poverty and deprivation.³⁰ While welfare generation and job creation are key to many aspects of human development, including poverty eradication, education or health care, there is no goal on economic welfare, equity or employment / decent jobs in the current set of MDGs. With the number of middle-income countries rising, the nature of the economic development challenges also changes. Rather than stimulating economic growth to reduce income poverty for the very poorest parts of society (as many, particularly Asian, countries have managed), many of the recently industrialised economies are now faced with the issue of increasing economic welfare in an inclusive and sustainable way, as the undesirable side-effects of a purely growth-based development model become more and more visible. The targets raised above could help to add substance to a global goal for increasing economic welfare and societal well-being in an inclusive way, avoiding the build-up of risks and imbalances.

Strengths: The SDG would be a concrete step to defining an agenda for real, inclusive economic welfare, which focuses not only on the absolute aggregate income, but also investigates how the income is generated, and how it adds to societal welfare and well-being. The SDG also addresses macroeconomic stability as a global public good, for which there is an actual need of improved coordination, as recently evidenced by the financial and economic crises since 2008.

Weaknesses: Some of the targets listed above – in particular equity and macroeconomic stability – would potentially have significant implications for governments that sign on to them, extending far beyond the usual confines of sustainable development (which is often still seen as an “environment plus” agenda), into the realm of economic governance and social policies. Yet, it is debatable whether there is sufficient political will amongst the would-be signatories to enter into such far-reaching commitments.

Options: extend the SDG to reflect the fact that the current paradigm of development through resource-intensive quantitative economic growth has reached (or, arguably, exceeded) its limits, as the absolute bio-physical limits are becoming more pressing: global ecosystems are used beyond their carrying capacity at the risk of irreversible degradation, and competition for scarce resources is increasing. Sustainable development is also about finding an economic development model that can be replicated globally – and at the same time stays within the planetary boundaries. The drawback is that while the case for such a “limits to growth” approach is convincing, it is unlikely to find broad support from developing countries, but is likely to lead

30 Martens, Jens: Thinking Ahead. Development Models and Indicators of Well-being Beyond the MDGs. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, November 2010

into protracted debates about the historical responsibility for ecosystem degradation and the “fair share” for using the limited natural resources.

7.2.6 SDG on energy and climate: Provide access to sustainable energy and limit climate change

Rationale: This SDG moves forward with the targets defined under the “sustainable energy for all” – initiative – universal access to modern energy services, a doubled rate of energy efficiency, and a doubled share of renewable energy – and links these targets to climate protection (and, possibly, reduction of air pollution). As with water and food, the climate / energy challenge is one of the big unresolved challenges for global sustainability, where current trends are far from converging onto a sustainable trajectory.

Possible targets:

- Ensure universal access to modern energy services (SE4all)
- Double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency (SE4all)
- Double the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix (SE4all)
- Curtail / reverse the growth in energy-related greenhouse gas emissions at a level that is compatible with limiting global average temperature rise to 2°C

Link to the post-2015 development agenda: access to modern energy services is a key element of poverty reduction, and has multiple implications for a number of aspects of human development facets – such as health (e.g. replacing indoor heating and cooking with traditional fuels, providing electricity for hospitals), education (e.g. allowing children to study at night), or gender equality (e.g. relieving women from collecting firewood). Likewise, climate change has the potential to exacerbate many threats to human development – through impacts on freshwater availability, agriculture and food supply, and the health of ecosystems and the services they provide. In turn, limiting climate change can help to at least ameliorate these threats.

Strengths: The set of energy targets under the “Sustainable Energy for All”-initiative is well-established and generally agreed. It is also considered as a good example of an integrated goal covering all three dimensions of sustainable development in a balanced way, and has multiple linkages to the wider development agenda. Given the global nature of climate change, with the absorptive capacity of the atmosphere as a global public good par excellence, the need for international coordination at the global level is absolutely needed.

Weaknesses: Climate change may seem as an obvious element of any set of global goals – as indeed it would seem odd to draw up a list of the biggest challenges facing humanity, and not include climate change on this list. And yet, in light of the protracted difficulties of achieving any progress in the multilateral climate negotiations, it is debatable if a climate-related SDG would have any additional impact, and would not merely repeat targets that have already been agreed elsewhere. Also, as with the land-use goal, the different targets under the energy-climate goal are not necessarily consistent. More specifically, whether the target of providing universal access to modern energy services can be reconciled with the need to limit (and ultimately reverse) energy-related greenhouse gas emissions will depend inter alia on the performance on the other two targets, energy efficiency and renewable energies.

7.3 Considerations for further / alternative SDGs

The above set of SDGs does not claim to be exhaustive, but merely seeks to identify, by way of illustration, some of the core challenges that ought to be addressed in a future set of SDGs. There are several other issues that could arguably be captured in further SDGs. Likewise, for the issues identified above, there are several alternative ways of framing and structuring the SDGs. How the issues identified above are represented in the final set of goals will also depend on the deliberations in the High-Level Panel that is tasked with mapping

the post-2015 development agenda; some of the aspects that are part of the SDGs above may also find their way into other, more development-driven goals.

In terms of possible alternative SDGs, the following options could be of interest:

- **SDG on the water-food-energy nexus:** The 2011 Nexus conference in Bonn has established the interlinked character of the challenges food crises, water insecurity, and energy needs, all of which are exacerbated by climate change. Given the interdependence between the targets, one option is to include them in one common SDG. This could take different forms: a nexus SDG with a more rural focus could include targets on sustainable agriculture and food production, freshwater ecosystems and agricultural water use, as well as renewable energy generation and rural electrification. A nexus with a more urban focus could include targets on food provision in urban areas, access to sanitation and wastewater services, as well as access to modern energy services. In either case, such an SDG would jointly address human needs and ensuring adequate human uses of ecosystems. A potential disadvantage is the complexity of the nexus topic: while there is logic to considering the three issues water-food-energy jointly, their interlinked character also means that there would be frequent trade-offs among the different nexus targets. This could complicate the interpretation and communication of a nexus SDG.
- **SDG on planetary boundaries or ecological footprint:** This SDG would capture the notion of a finite absolute carrying capacity of the global ecosystems, and that this carrying capacity cannot be exceeded on an ongoing basis. Otherwise, there is a risk of irreversible damage to global ecosystems, and a permanent loss of the services they provide. This would in turn threaten to erode the basis for human welfare, and disproportionately affect the poor, who depend directly on ecosystems for their livelihoods. Such an SDG could be based on the nine planetary boundaries identified by Rockström et al.³¹ While the concept of planetary boundaries / ecological footprint is well suited to guarantee environmental integrity, an important drawback is that any decision on absolute limits will immediately lead to a discussion on the “fair share” for using the limited resource. Ultimately, it may turn that the discussion on fair share and equitable access to limited resources cannot be avoided. Still, it is debatable whether the SDG process provides a suitable forum to accommodate this discussion. And there is a real risk that the discussion on fair share may effectively paralyse the negotiation process, as witnessed in the international climate regime.
- **SDG on resource efficiency:** this would establish dematerialisation of the world economy as an objective in its own right, i.e. absolute decoupling of resource consumption and economic development. Proponents of this idea have argued that the physical throughput of an economy (Domestic Material Consumption, DMC) in combination with total material input, can serve as a “lead indicator” which captures a range of other environmental impacts. Simply put, an economy that on the one hand is lighter on consumption of material resources and on the other hand needs less material input for domestic production will also perform better in terms of carbon emissions, biodiversity impacts, etc.
- **Sustainable agriculture and food supply:** this would include targets related to agricultural productivity, security of food supply, reduction of food waste, soil protection, biodiversity, etc. This

³¹ An alternative approach, following the same logic, would be to base the SDG on the ecological footprint (including water and carbon footprint), see Wackernagel and Rees (1996). Using a different metric, the ecological footprint embodies the same idea of finite carrying capacity and the safe use of global ecosystems with ecological limits. While the footprint's advantage is that it is intuitively appealing and easy to communicate, considerable controversy remains around the indicator and the underlying methodology (see e.g. Best et al. 2008).

SDG would take up one of the most pressing concerns for sustainable development, where current trends are still very remote from any type of sustainable pathway (PBL 2012). As one of its targets, an SDG on agriculture would have to cover the biodiversity impact of agriculture, given the sector's role as a key driver for land use change. A separate SDG on sustainable agriculture would only be necessary if food and agriculture issues are not already covered through a "nexus" target.

- **Specific environmental problems:** Introducing SDGs for more specific challenges or environmental issues, such as separate SDGs for biodiversity or soil protection, would not appear feasible (nor sensible). There is a risk that this would result in a large number of SDGs, each with a limited scope. The resulting fragmentation would make it more difficult to communicate the SDGs; it would create a need to set clear priorities or even a hierarchy of goals. And, last but not least, it would pose a challenge for the integration of the SDGs with the MDGs.

8 Conclusions: How to Achieve One Set of Goals

It is **imperative to have one set of goals** that integrates the post-2015 development agenda and the longer-term quest for sustainable development. The alternative, having two separate sets of goals, is undesirable for a number of reasons, even if two sets of goals were closely coordinated and similarly dedicated to sustainable development. Having two sets of goals would run the risk of incoherent or even contradicting targets, it would risk creating inefficiencies in terms of reporting obligations and data collection, it would run the risk of imbalanced funding and obstruct an effective prioritisation of efforts. But most of all, a situation with **two sets of targets would make the communication of the targets much more difficult**: a key function of the targets is to rally the global community – governments and stakeholders alike – around a few clear, universally understandable and globally accepted goals. Having two sets of goals would blur this clear message, it would make communication much more challenging, and thereby risk sidelining both sets of goals and ultimately rendering them irrelevant. In recognition of these risks, many actors, including the EU or the Secretary General, have called for one set of goals.

But agreeing on one set of goals is easier said than done. The timeframe is tight; most countries have not positioned themselves; so far, the process lacks credible leadership. It is unclear which country or stakeholder could make the substantive input required to start the earnest negotiation on substance. Leading developing countries would have the credibility and authority to instantiate negotiations on substance, but have not signalled their intention to lead. In addition, some observers see the risk that important countries might **pay lip service to strong SDGs** (including a strong environmental element), but at the same time delegate sustainability issues to the SDG Working Group, which they expect to remain weak and largely sidelined. The High Level Panel, at the same time, would focus on a relatively narrow vision of poverty reduction – which is less likely to interfere with traditional economic policies focused above all on rapid economic growth.³² Other observers believe that the SDG process will have more political clout because it is government-led.

Still, there are a number of important **tactics that can help to achieve “one set of goals”**:

- **Focus on goals for poverty eradication that incentivise environmental protection:** Coherence is a strong argument, but achieving one set of goals will ultimately depend on reconciling what many perceive as a conflict between poverty eradication and economic development on the one hand and environmental protection on the other. For this reason, achieving one set of goals will require balancing poverty eradication and environmental protection where necessary, and focussing efforts on those fields where poverty eradication and environmental protection can be achieved jointly: goals for poverty eradication that incentivize environmental protection or environmental goals that help reduce poverty are good candidates for achieving one set of goals. More concrete and practical goals such as those of the Energy for All Initiative make a stronger case for one set of goals.
- **Address the risk of environmental degradation to undo many development gains:** A narrow focus on poverty eradication and economic growth, achieved at the expense of a healthy environment, will undermine human development and ultimately be self-defeating. It is the poorest parts of the population that depend directly on ecosystems for their livelihood and welfare.

³² Evans (2012)

Therefore, the risk is great that short-term gains in economic development will backfire if they erode the ecological basis.

- **Take MDGs as a starting point:** As a matter of pragmatism, there are good reasons to take the MDGs as a point of departure for building one set of goals – they are widely accepted, (fairly well) integrated, (mostly) measureable, and have proven to be influential in setting the global political agenda. The MDGs have succeeded in providing a significant reference point for development policies around the world and for donors’ funding decision. Obviously, aligning the SDGs to an already-established MDG process could result in a dominance of the MDGs. But it also provides an opportunity to mainstream environmental policies and the wider development agenda. The current MDGs were largely driven by the goal of poverty eradication goal and by traditional notions of economic development and growth; and such aspirations will likely continue to play an important role in the post-2015 development agenda. This means that the SDGs, to be successfully with the set of MDGs, must at least be compatible with the goal of poverty eradication, or better still focus on issues where the two agendas can be implemented jointly.
- **Focus on a small number of exemplary issues** – do not aim to be comprehensive: If the SDGs themselves were to serve as a stand-alone set of goals (irrespective of the post-2015 development agenda), there should be less than 10 SDGs. If the SDGs are considered as input to the MDG process, that will be merged with the proposed MDGs to form one set of goals, there might be only 2-3 goals in the final "one set of goals" that have a strong focus on environmental sustainability. All of this implies that the SDGs cannot be exhaustive, but have to focus on selected issues, which should be exemplary for the wider challenge that they address.
- **Link proposals to the negotiation process:** The UN Secretary General has proposed to use the special event on the post 2015 MDGs – scheduled for the third quarter of 2013 – to place the two processes on a “common track”. It seems indeed sensible to merge the two processes at the special event. The timing of the special event seems to fit well into the negotiations processes: The intergovernmental working group is expected to have produced its first interim report before the special event; the MDG 2013 gap report will be available; the High Level Panel will have presented its report and the High Level Political Forum could have met for the first time; with the submission of the High Level Panel report, the post-2015 MDG process will lack a forum for discussion. To merge the two processes, the special event could agree that a revised (SDG) working group would take forward the negotiations of one set of goals. This would require giving the working group a new mandate, composition and – possibly – name. The exact format of the working group is an open question which needs to be addressed in the coming months. The revised mandate and composition of the working group should be adopted through a resolution of the General Assembly.

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