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# RIO+20, Sustainable Development Goals and Post 2015 Decisions

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The Millennium Development Goals, RIO+20, and the emerging sustainable development goals (SDGs) are intricately interwoven with one another and with the initiatives of other agencies and UN regimes. This paper develops those interrelationships and positions the roles of nongovernmental organizations as the boundary institutions that encourage those goals to be mobilized into action at the local and global levels.

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## **RIO+20, Sustainable Development Goals and Post-2015 Decisions**

Successful policy interlinks efforts to address ecological, social, economic and cultural issues. It interweaves local and regional actions with regional, national and multilateral processes and agreements which can become permanent and binding, yet flexible. The current Kyoto Protocol is a top-down agreement that has proven to be unmanageably rigid in an increasingly complex societal context. It is dominated by market mechanisms with insufficient regard for social and environmental values and methods. Pushing the legal framework in advance of institutional revisions weakens an already brittle structure. Strength, stability and binding authorities must develop rather than launch prematurely<sup>i</sup> offering incentives such that no state benefits from withholding and no state accrues benefits by failing to comply.

With complementary climate, disaster risk reduction and other agreements, the Kyoto Protocol could transform from what many see as the only structure providing a legal basis for energy and climate change action into a more workable system within our emerging multi-polar world. Rather than “saving” Kyoto in its current form, trade and climate change in cooperative alliance can act together to dissolve arbitrary barriers and include the appropriate actors at the right points in the process for swift and durable movement.

Civil Society, Millennium Development Goals, RIO+ 20 and post 2015 are intricately linked. The world cannot afford to wait for lengthy process actions before tackling the broader challenges threatening sustainable development, poverty, climate change and other global issues that affect local people. Rio +20 is an important staging ground for negotiating a new framework. Another key event is the MDG Review Summit in 2013 where these discussions need to be formalized. Further, a UN summit to adopt a new framework for when the MDGs expire in 2015 should be organized. Key to success of this summit is that it must be aligned with, and facilitate progress in other global, regional and local processes.

### **LINKS BETWEEN RIO+20, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND MDGs**

Sustainable development and in particular the sustainable development goals (SDGs) have received criticism due to their similarities with the post-2015 development agenda, which includes MDGs and post-MDG processes. They are linked and mutually supportive, rather than redundant as some have suggested. For example, the MDGs, despite their notable achievements to date, namely, improvements in the poverty level, increased aid from industrialized countries, and promotion of the various forms of stakeholder participation are charged with 1) neglecting issues in developed countries, 2) not considering the real needs in recipient countries, particularly those of marginalized populations, and 3) utilizing a donor-driven design, which led to 1) and 2) above.

For these and other reasons, the current MDG framework, including potential post-MDGs, do not or cannot fully address emerging and/or urgent issues, such as climate change, energy

security, loss of biodiversity, disaster preparedness and resilience. In one example, MDG7 stipulates environmental but not quantitative goals, and in particular, goals related to forest issues and CO2 emissions are less ambitious than for other areas. Therefore, it should be clarified that SDGs are not an alternative to the past or ongoing frameworks, including MDGs, but can address the shortcomings and challenges facing MDGs, and broaden their goals to reflect other SD objectives, as already agreed to by governments. For example, poverty eradication—which is a key objective of MDGs—is also one of the overarching objectives of SD and thus should be fully articulated in SDGs, alongside the other objectives of environmental protection and sustainable consumption and production. Based upon the experiences of MDGs, ensuring multi-layer, multi-stakeholder participation throughout the development process of SDGs is the key for successful implementation.

The previous two Earth Summits, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992 and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002 together with the Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) Aichi Biodiversity Targets, the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provide a framework for achieving sustainable development. Implementation has been incomplete and many gaps remain in areas ranging from human health, to disaster reduction, migration and the oceans. For example, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) could achieve a renewed prominence through integration with other sustainable development initiatives. The current MDG framework does not address growth or governance in its 60 goals for peace, development, the environment, human rights, the vulnerable, hungry, and poor, Africa, or the United Nations. Rio+20 provides an opportunity to directly and purposefully link the MDGs to SDGs and establish targets beyond 2015. Similar opportunities exist with other actions and frameworks that affect the success of a revised sustainable development process.

***Specific Action Recommendations:***

1) **Education.** In January 2012, Ban Ki-moon, presented his action agenda for the next five years highlighting priorities both in the final work towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, and to promote sustainable development goals beyond 2015. As Ban Ki-moon stated, education is a vital key to linking RIO+20, sustainable development and the MDGs.

2) **Inclusion of other initiatives and frameworks.** Linking other initiatives specifically including the Hyogo Framework for Action to the MDG Review Summit in 2013 in evaluating the MDG framework and post-MDG scenario discussions contribute to the process of formulating SDGs that are flexible to new learning, commitment structures and partnership relationships while remaining robust.

3) **Addressing changing modalities of international collaboration** surrounding sustainable development. As the modes change from North-South to a new type of collective action involving all countries and stakeholders, it moves swiftly past replacing North-South partnerships with South-South or even triangular cooperation; instead the model is now a

network of collaborators. A vital part of this network is the public-private partnerships that are increasingly crucial for solving common problems and advancing shared interests.

It is vitally important that the SDGs are complementary to the MDGs and support their attainment. The SDGs must be fully integrated into a global overarching post-2015 development framework, as it would be both inefficient and short-sighted to develop them in isolation. The MDGs remain vital development objectives and having measurable targets has helped to focus global attention on progress towards the eradication of poverty, improvement of health and universal education, among others.

### **TRANSITIONS AND LINKS BETWEEN SDGs AND THE POST 2015 PROCESSES**

Incorporating successes and working mechanisms into combined multilateral standpoints that reward political support for sustainability and climate change action, discourage free-riding, and leverage actions such as RTAs (regional trade agreements) with strong commitments for GHG emissions, health and adaptation commitments. The broad issues outlined for international attention to sustainability include the following:

- *Combating Poverty*
- *Altering Consumption Patterns*
- *Promoting Sustainable Human Settlement Development*
- *Migration*
- *Climate Change Adaptation*
- *Disaster Risk Reduction and Management*
- *Biodiversity and Forests*
- *Oceans*
- *Water Resources*
- *Advancing Food Security*
- *Energy, including from renewable sources*

Current modalities used to address these issues do not sufficiently account for local knowledge, localized conditions (environmentally, socially and politically) or the impediments and motivations for local action. Working at this type of knowledge interface of cultures, disciplines and interests involves people at the community level in policy-relevant participation, in gathering data, in interpreting expert opinions within local contexts, and in direct participation in national level discourse that transcends sectoral priorities and offers suggestions that can be replicated in other global locations through integration into the UN regime structures. What is needed is a method through which to enhance the sustainable development concept using appropriate indicators. By using the universal and measurable indicator of human health in action frameworks, which is evidenced in successes and failure metrics by agriculture, disaster risk reduction, energy, climate change, trade and labor policies among others, the pillars of

sustainable development are aligned with appropriate attention to the social and environmental values that operate to support healthy global economies.

The primary objective of SDGs is to further the MDG vision while reaffirming the past political commitments of all actors as well as ensuring tangible actions to take place towards sustainable development. If SDGs are to offer a more comprehensive framework to respond to these needs while also envisioning poverty eradication as an overarching goal, transitions must be in place between SDGs and post 2015. In order to do this, adoption of an ambitious SDG mandate at Rio+20 is critical in order to realign and reignite worldwide efforts towards creating the future. As a first step towards integrating the SDG processes and other initiatives into a single unified process, defining these transitions at RIO+20 would be highly advantageous as this would set out a clear post-2015 framework with measurements that extend far beyond GDP.

Factors that could be integrated include MDG implementation and review, post-MDG preparation, and the Secretary General's "Sustainable Energy for All by 2030" initiative. In this regard, it is crucial to define near-term benchmarks while envisioning long-term goals (tentatively set for 2030). At the same time, consistency between national and global policies should be ensured while setting appropriate minimums for common/ global goals, as well as allowing countries to dictate their own national targets according to domestic priorities and capacities. Taking into account the above-mentioned objective of SDGs, a recap of the existing commitments, including Agenda 21, the Hyogo Framework for Action, and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) helps identify the potential scope of SDGs. Creating blueprint for the scope of SDGs based on these and other existing documents, but embraces the broader challenges as well as emerging possibilities.

#### **ENGAGING CIVIL SOCIETY FOR GREATER POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION IMPACT**

UN regimes increasingly stress the need to more completely integrate civil society into the processes. What are the roles of civil society? The development of the post 2015 framework (and its monitoring) must include an extensive consultation involving all stakeholders at local, national, regional and global levels. This must include a formalized and meaningful process for civil society engagement. The process as well as the acts of creating a post-2015 development framework must be transparent, participatory and open. It needs to engage people affected by poverty, particularly those who experience marginalization, such as women, disabled people, and indigenous people. The process by which the SDGs are created will be key to its success. This means significantly changing the paradigm and how civil society is included. **Inclusion extends far beyond observation.** Civil society itself has been marginalized in prior processes by being denied access to timely information and discussions, and through having input dismissed or discounted unless vetted under specific partner endorsements (whether those be larger, more UN mainstream NGOs or UN agencies or national governments). As civil society has struggled to find a meaningful voice, trust in the UN system, its processes, outputs and outcomes have suffered.

Trust is a prerequisite to durable legally binding agreements. Rebuilding confidence and trust in the US system is served by eliminating arbitrary divisions between countries, sectors and within systems to increase flexibility to changing science, political and economic systems while supporting incentives and reordering priorities that put people and the environment on a par with market systems and technologies. A more flexible process requires a restructured interaction among policy actors to reflect the interdependence between local, national and multilateral processes. Concepts like the European concept of variable geometry in policy negotiations (also known as enhanced cooperation) can enhance and make the global sustainability system more viable, more realistic, and more trusted<sup>ii</sup>.

NGOs, frequently cited as the most effective local implementation agents for poverty eradication, education and capacity building, adaptation and disaster reduction and relief, need direct and specific support from the multilateral system and from governments rather than being considered either competitive or a “necessary inconvenience.” Directly involving civil society in setting policy as well as in local implementation of action supports prioritizing institutional development over the development of a legal framework - a necessary requirement to rebuild trust. It also gives local interests a voice in policy because NGOs as boundary organizations can represent those interests more authentically than governmental bodies whose foci are sufficiently (and often appropriately) different from those of the local community. Convening groups of countries for bilateral and regional sustainable development and environmental agreements and purposefully including the diverse range of institutions now relegated to non-decision making, Civil Society Organizations, in current regime complexes<sup>iii</sup> creates a stronger bond between decisions and community-level implementation.

A more meaningful inclusion of civil society can't wait for the normal mechanisms taken by the UN to change at their normal pace of operations. While 2015 is the target for new frameworks, new actions need to be undertaken WHILE these frameworks are being constructed. They will be taken on the ground, not just in the halls of negotiating bodies. Unless a flexible, organic mechanism is created that integrates the intentions of the MDGs and other formal agreements like the Hyogo Framework for Action, local actions will continue to focus more on disaster relief than on planning, changing lifestyles and local decisions to more sustainable directions, and including the people of nations to participate alongside their governments in creating locally viable and globally necessary solutions.

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<sup>i</sup> Bodansky, D. and Diringer, E., 2007. Towards an Integrated Multi-Track Climate Framework. Pew Center on Global Climate Change.

<sup>ii</sup> Examples of this approach include the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, WTO and the creation of the Montreal Protocol.

<sup>iii</sup> Keohane, R., and Victor, D., 2011. “The Regime Complex for Climate Change” in Perspectives on Politics, 9(1), 7-23.