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From MDGs to SDGs: learning the right lessons for a transformative development agenda

Sustainable Development Goals: a call for urgency and action

a daily multi-stakeholder magazine on climate change and sustainable development

outreach.

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Outreach is a multi-stakeholder publication on climate change and sustainable development. It is the longest continually produced stakeholder magazine in the sustainable development arena, published at various international meetings on the environment; including the UNCD meetings (since 1997), UNEP Governing Council, UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP) and World Water Week. Published as a daily edition, in both print and web form, Outreach provides a vehicle for critical analysis on key thematic topics in the sustainability arena, as well as a voice of regional and local governments; women, indigenous peoples, trade unions, industry, youth and NGOs. To fully ensure a multi-stakeholder perspective, we aim to engage a wide range of stakeholders for article contributions and project funding.

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Governments at Rio+20 are likely to launch a new set of global goals: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals could guide the urgent action the world needs to change course and deliver prosperity for all, without exceeding natural limits. But as things stand there is a real danger that all Rio will deliver is a three year long process to discuss aspirational goals that in the end will not deliver for people and the planet.

SDGs, which were first proposed by Colombia and Guatemala, are to be an integrated set of voluntary, universally applicable global goal statements organised by thematic areas, with time-bound, quantitative targets and a suite of indicators to be adopted at the national level, which aim to catalyse pathways to sustainable development. Based on the experience of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the idea is to have goals to guide the international community’s efforts and make it easier for governments, institutions and civil society to work together to achieve them.

Many countries have agreed the following principles to guide the formulation of the SDGs

- The goals should be aspirational, universal in scope, and adapted to the circumstances and priorities of each country.
- The application of the SDGs will reflect and enhance the principle of equity.
- Their implementation will build capacity in developing countries to address identified issues in a lasting manner.
- The development of targets and indicators should incorporate social, economic and environmental dimensions.
- Targets should also serve to characterise linkages among SDGs, for example the nexus of water, energy and food security issues.

Linkages to the MDGs

The relationship between the MDGs and SDGs is still under discussion. The premise is that Rio will serve to strengthen the MDGs and their core mission of poverty eradication. As part of the post 2015 process, including the 2013 review of the MDGs, updated MDGs and new thematic areas for SDGs will be made complementary and mutually supportive.

Indicative listing of SDGs

There seems to be broad consensus around a core set of issues. Poverty eradication is an overarching goal to which all SDGs must contribute. Given the growing sense of urgency and need for action, based on wide consultation the Governments of Colombia, Peru and United Arab Emirates have put forth an indicative list which strikes us as sensible.

What does Greenpeace think of the SDGs?

Greenpeace is appalled at the lack of urgency in the SDG discussions. We should see the same sense of urgency as the policy responses to the global economic and financial crises. Governments, for example, should agree at Rio to deliver energy for all with renewable energy and zero deforestation by 2020. Those would be Sustainable Development Goals fit for the task of delivering sustainable development.

Agreeing on aspirational long term SDGs by 2015 to be achieved by 2030 simply won’t deliver sustainability; it’s too little, too late. The focus has to be on this decade, as choices made within this timeframe will be crucial for preventing catastrophic climate change, saving our oceans and protecting remaining natural forests, all of which are fundamental for human development and wellbeing. We therefore believe SDGs should set targets that are no further away than two election periods at most – which means 2020 – in order to ensure immediate implementation and avoid gaps in political commitment. Greenpeace explicitly supports the universality of SDGs. MDGs failed to specify sufficiently how developed countries need to change. SDGs should set out actions required from developed countries, too, especially in the field of sustainable consumption and production.

We see the need for full integration with the MDGs, as a splintering of global sustainable development efforts would be disastrous. We must avoid a lowering of ambition due to process concerns, though. The challenge is to balance ambition and urgency with the need to have inclusive processes. Interim targets could be a viable solution.
The road to Rio has been long and the negotiations have been fraught. But it's the road from Rio that has to concern us now. There is much to do, and less time and political will than we might like, to make the changes that people and planet need. So to make the most of what we have, we must focus.

Beyond 2015, the global civil society campaign on the post-2015 development framework, has been supporting the proposal for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We recognise the intention to respond to the complex global challenges that we face today with a suitably robust framework for development, with sustainability and poverty reduction at its core.

Many of our members are actively engaged with achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and we therefore welcome new language that specifically mentions the integration of the proposed SDGs with learnings from the previous decade in the development agenda post-2015:

‘These goals should be incorporated and integrated in the United Nations Development Agenda beyond 2015, thus contributing to the achievement of sustainable development and serving as a driver for implementation and mainstreaming of sustainable development in the United Nations system as a whole.’

One, not two, processes

But it is important to go a step further: it must be the processes, not just the agendas, that are integrated straight after Rio+20, and by the MDG Summit in 2013 at the very latest. Otherwise we risk wasting energy and resources trying to drive two parallel processes.

Sustainable development must be at the heart of the new development framework as a genuine integration for progress on both poverty and environmental concerns. In an increasingly resource-constrained world, only an efficient way forward will enable everybody to focus on what matters: driving actual change for people living in poverty.

Although mainstreaming sustainable development across the UN system is entirely necessary, it must be recognised that SDGs will only be one tool to do that, alongside measuring progress beyond GDP, accounting for the negative environmental and social impacts of economic growth, and reallocating socially and environmentally harmful subsidies – particularly for fossil fuels – towards equitable and sustainable energy provision. It will take much more than the SDGs to achieve this – despite the political will that has been generated around the SDGs, we should not mistake them for the silver bullet that will cure all ills.

Three next steps for the Outcome Document

What is not clear in the new language is how these two agendas and the respective processes will be integrated. Rather, it implies that the SDGs will be fully formulated before merging them with the development agenda ‘beyond 2015,’ which will be problematic for both SDGs and post MDGs.

It is fundamental that we recognise that we can no longer try to address the development issues of poverty reduction and environmental sustainability without tackling the systemic drivers. Embedding sustainable consumption and production to rebalance the disparity between the wealthy and the poor is key to this and must remain in the Outcome Document. A holistic framework which, while ensuring that we all have responsibility to contribute to the future we want, recognises our different capacities for action – for the global North, global South, and every country transitioning between – is essential.

But most importantly, the framework must be a legitimate, transparent, and inclusive process which takes into account the priorities and perspectives of people living in poverty. This will help ensure that actual progress on the ground can be achieved and that the people who should ultimately benefit from all this will be heard.
Sustainable Development Goals: a step change for a sustainable future or sustaining the conventional world view?

Deborah Tripley
Planetary Boundaries Initiative

At the end of the last preparatory meeting in New York on 2 June 2012 the Under Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs, Mr Sha Zukang, expressed his hopes that Rio+20 would provide the ‘step change’ necessary to put the world on the road to sustainable development.

Outlining a number of outcomes which he considered could promote such a step change, Mr Zukang referred to the possibility of a process to define a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a central feature of a post-2015 development framework.

The latest version of the Co-Chairs’ Outcome Document posits the prospect of a set of global SDGs established by means of an intergovernmental process under the auspices of the General Assembly and brought into existence by 2015. These goals would be both policy oriented – fixed on sectoral issues such as water scarcity or ocean acidification – and cross-cutting, to take into account gender and poverty issues.

It is further proposed that the General Assembly would have the task of establishing a coherent methodology for the integration of the three pillars of sustainable development, taking into account current global environmental reports and assessments and other stakeholder input.

It is difficult to understand why the concept of SDGs has so evidently caught the imagination of many participating countries, but it seems that some have been encouraged by the apparent progress made towards achieving some of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

It is becoming clear from the process so far that progress towards a set of global SDGs is likely to be the outcome considered as having sufficient legacy value by the end of Rio+20.

From the start of the Rio+20 process, the Planetary Boundaries Initiative (PBI), has advocated that the current scientific consensus regarding the limits to earth’s carrying capacity requires urgent action that goes beyond conventional sustainability models.

In our view, SDGs have a place but only once there has been a significant shift in the existing institutional frameworks. For instance, we would want to see a new specialised institutional body at supra national level, focused on reviewing the state of the planet and the earth’s carrying capacity as a pre-condition to the setting of any SDGs.

We agree also with the Global Environmental Outlook Report 5 (GEO-5) that any suite of SDGs must be focused on the drivers of current unsustainable patterns of human consumption, and not its consequences. We consider there is a need for public debate on a new compact with society for transformational governance.

The GEO-5 report states:

‘As global ecological and institutional systems are extremely complex and slow to change, decisions made today have long term and far-reaching impacts. Without addressing the drivers behind the current trajectory, it will be difficult to move to an environmentally sustainable suite of choices and outcomes. At the same time the need for urgency must be recognized’. (p.24)

Although the GEO-5 report supports a series of SDGs that are centred on human wellbeing, measurable metrics and coherent and balanced integration, it also places considerable emphasis on the establishment of a set of global sustainable targets.

It stresses that these targets should be quantifiable and not just qualitative – and expressed as assisting with a transition to long term sustainable world scenarios – identified by clear long term environmental and development targets – and provide for stronger accountability in international agreements – such as policy commitments or planetary boundaries (fig.16.1 – chapter 16, p. 421).

The report depicts a world in 2050 that has truly put itself on track for a more sustainable and transformative approach to governance; suggesting that:

‘The resulting intergenerational contract, building on momentum already present in society, supported a generation of problem-solvers who had never learned values and behaviours that undermined planetary life support systems...’ (chapter 16)

This vision is a long way from the one expressed currently in the draft Outcome Document.

Whilst SDG 7 refers to a global set of indicators to be assessed on the basis of specific targets, it goes on to suggest that these could be differentiated by countries depending on levels of development and national specificities.

These targets are a long way from the setting of sustainable development goals within the parameters of biophysical limits.

In our view, without any reference in the final Outcome Document to sustainable thresholds and boundaries the SDGs are likely to fail and prove to be a missed opportunity for a real ‘step change’ – putting Earth on a more sustainable path for achieving future long term social and ecological well being.
Since the first Rio Conference on Sustainable Development in 1992, the number of people living in extreme poverty has increased in many nations, especially in the least developed countries. The gap between rich and poor in Western economies is at its widest in 30 years, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Over 200 million people in the world are jobless and youth unemployment in industrialised counties is at its highest since records began in 1976.

Not only has there been little progress in the fight against extreme poverty, but because of climate change and environmental degradation, people living in extreme poverty now face greater exposure to ever more difficult and dangerous phenomenon such as natural disasters. Resources like food, energy and water are becoming scarce, and while people have to compete for resources that become more and more expensive, the most vulnerable pay with their lives. For them, it is not, and has never been, a question of the ‘Future We Want’ but rather the ‘Present They Have the Right To’.

In this context, we could say that the attempts by different Member States to galvanise commitments during Rio+20 on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is nothing other than welcome.

However in reality, what would be far more welcome is if they had dared to stop and take stock of the actual situation – what were the commitments made in Rio 20 years ago? How many of those commitments have been kept or delivered on? How many have even been attempted? Why has there been so little progress? Who is responsible? Do those who have been responsible for implementing these commitments - but have on the whole failed to do so - have the right to make more promises?

In this context, when so many promises and commitments are made, but rarely kept, what can we do? We should dare to look, listen and learn from the people that are suffering the most, the ones that are on the front-line of action to tackle environmental crises, building their resistance with very little means, but with the knowledge and experience gained from generations of living in hardship.

What do people living in poverty say about the process:
“It is not so much the solutions reached in our dialogue that are important, it is rather being able to reach these solutions all together”.

The SDGs could be welcome if they were developed from the beginning through an open and inclusive process in which all stakeholders, including people living in extreme poverty, are included.

What do people living in poverty say about the content:
“The fight is not about winning the freedom to eat enough, but the freedom to create and to build”.

The discussion should not simply be about creating a cleaner, healthier and better earth, it should consider how to ensure every human being has the means to take care of their forests, rivers and oceans, to contribute with their work to the wellbeing of their families, communities and countries, and to contribute with their knowledge to a better understanding among peoples.

Must haves for the SDGs

- The SDGs must focus on achieving full and equal enjoyment of the rights of all people. They must address – in a holistic and equitable manner – economic, environmental and social dimensions to create a sustainable development framework that has at its core the eradication of extreme poverty.

- The SDGs have to be underpinned by an equity approach and accepted human rights principles and standards will give priority to the challenges faced by the poorest and most excluded people and populations.

- A human rights based approach to the SDGs includes the full participation of all those concerned, including people marginalised by extreme poverty, in the design, implementation and assessment of all affiliated programmes and policies.

More info
Quotes are taken from participatory research on the theme, ‘Extreme poverty is violence: breaking the silence, searching for peace’, ATD Fourth World. More than 1000 people from 25 different countries participated, the majority of which live in conditions of extreme poverty. www.atd-fourthworld.org/-The-Violence-Done-To-The-Poor.html
The next decade is a crucial period for our globally interconnected society to change course towards a sustainable future for all nations. The UN’s Rio+20 summit is a landmark opportunity to rise to this challenge. One proposal before the summit is to commit to the development of universal sustainable development goals (SDGs) to take effect from 2015.

There are several sets of proposals for what these goals could look like, and this should be a vital piece of policy development over the coming 12 months. The precise definition of these goals should not be rushed into – we need to take time to set goals, indicators and targets that genuinely set the directions for the planet, and to ensure that everyone agrees to them.

But as decision-makers commit to this development at Rio, they should commit negotiators to two principles which are not clear in the current texts.

1. The goals must add up to global sustainability. At present the goals are conceived as being for sustainable development for all countries (hence universal) which is good. But it would be possible to meet sustainable development goals in each country and still breach planetary boundaries, so the emergent property of global sustainability must be factored in. The sum of all our national activities must still fit within the planet’s capacity.

2. Each goal should deeply entwine economic, social and environmental outcomes. There are so many synergies and trade-offs between the so-called three pillars that, unless these are dealt with together, opportunities are missed and conflicts created. By linking them explicitly in most SDGs – such as sustainable energy for all, or food security without environmental damage or equitable access to resources – the synergies and trade-offs are, instead, exposed for explicit consideration. This will have many benefits of reducing the costs of action as well as avoiding maladaptation.

The past two decades of research into planetary-scale changes has demonstrated the colossal scale of the human imprint on the planet. This is epitomised by the concept of the Anthropocene – human impact has been sufficient to push Earth into a new geological epoch. This new context carries with it a stark conclusion: sustainable development cannot be viewed merely as some abstract ideal. Instead, global sustainability must be the bedrock of societies and all nation states, a conclusion articulated in the recently published State of the Planet Declaration published by the Planet Under Pressure conference.

The State of the Planet Declaration argues that the Rio+20 proposal to develop Sustainable Development Goals provides a clear opportunity to develop a workable international strategy for global sustainability and prosperity. However, these goals need careful analysis and must be mindful of interconnections in the earth system. The above two principles are vital writing instructions for the UN Task Team that the UN Secretary General established in January 2012 to support the post 2015 development agenda building on MDGs.
Although most NGOs support the rationale behind the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), many are worried by the low levels of ambition.

In response, a set of Peoples’ Sustainability Treaties has emerged. Since their public introduction in New York in January, 14 treaties have been drafted and signed by an increasingly wide range of civil society leaders. This bottom-up and transparent process aims to demonstrate leadership and provide a constructive and collective way forward in and beyond Rio.

The launch of the Treaties in RioCentro on Wednesday 13th June was supported by Tariq Banuri, former Director of the Rio+20 secretariat; Felix Dodds, Executive Director of Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future; and eight other leading lights in civil society. At last year’s NGO/DPI conference in Bonn, Germany, Uchita de Zoysa, the initiator of Peoples’ Sustainability Treaties, said that “we should not make the ultimate mistake of not documenting the aspirations of people for sustainable future at this critical period of time. Civil society needs to assume their rightful place in the global citizenry and provide vision, leadership, and commitment”. The Treaties avoid that mistake from materialising.

Free of personal or professional interests, the Peoples’ Sustainability Treaties were made without funding or affiliation to any corporation, government or organisation. Free from any parallel agendas, they aptly reflect the true sentiments of civil society. Many of the ten speakers stressed the lack of reference to equity in current version of the Outcome Document. Another recurring theme was the need to move from rights to responsibility. “If implementation is the main problem, then we should be more clear as to who is responsible for what”, emphasised de Zoysa. Leida Rijnhout from ANPED also reflected the mood well when stating that she considers the Treaties as “an instrument to push the governments to raise their ambition level”, and added that they will constitute “a civil society platform for years to come”. Some speakers presented the treaty they coordinated. Ashish Kothari for example, as chair of Greenpeace India, explained how the Treaty on radical ecological democracy combines a real form of participative democracy with a deep respect for our ecological limits.

Finally, Tariq Banuri made a strong comment on an aspect rarely debated in conferences like these. “We know there is a rise in fascist movements. This is not unrelated to the fear that people feel, a fear that comes from the awareness that something is limited, that the age of plenty has come to an end and that business as usual is no longer possible. It is our challenge to respond by showing that another world where we can live together is possible”.

More info
On the 16th June, the treaties will be subject to a full day of open dialogue at the Peoples’ Summit. An overview of the events in which they will be discussed can be found here: www.sustainabilitytreaties.org/events/

Contribute to Outreach

To read the guidelines for contributions and to see the themes for this round of editions visit: www.stakeholderforum.org/sf/outreach/index.php/contribute

To submit an article for publishing email Georgie Macdonald (gmacdonald@stakeholderforum.org) and Amy Cutter (acutter@stakeholderforum.org).
From MDGs to SDGs: learning the right lessons for a transformative development agenda

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Indeed, the strengths of the MDG approach – their simplicity and broad appeal – also make for their main weaknesses, as they obfuscate the hard structural and dialectical processes at the core of poverty and underdevelopment. As Charles Gore puts it, the ascendency of the MDG approach as the lynchpin of the current international development consensus involves ditching the notion of development as a comprehensive process that entails evolution and structural transformation, in favour of development conceived as a collection of quantifiable performance standards.

In other words, the MDG approach reduces the process of development to meeting specific, absolute, and measurable aspects of poverty or underdevelopment – such as hunger, or infant mortality – without tackling the roots of poverty and underdevelopment that give rise to hunger and preventable deaths in the first place.

For instance the distribution of mosquito bed nets has made some improvements to reducing child mortality in Africa, even as real improvements in the delivery of health services remain on the backburner.

The MDGs have certainly led to a number of noteworthy achievements, but short of structural transformation and a departure from conservative macroeconomic policy frameworks, it is hard to think how these quick wins might be sustained over the long term.

Indeed, the eruption of economic, climate, and food crises in recent years suggests that without comprehensively addressing the power imbalances and short-termist policy choices at the root of poverty and underdevelopment, quick successes with meeting particular MDGs or SDGs are bound to be eroded no sooner than they are won.

SDGs can only contribute to sustainable development if they address the structural causes of poverty and unsustainable development. This means calling for the end to the current unsustainable neoliberal model of production and consumption that allows uninhibited environmental destruction and violation of human rights. Moreover, SDGs will ultimately be unsuccessful if they fail to challenge the status quo in which the benefits from economic development remain accumulated in the hands of the few, while the environmental and social costs continue to be borne by the larger part of the population whose needs, even the most basic ones, are not met.

The temptation to adopt the MDG-approach (Millennium Development Goal) to the challenge of sustainable development is easy to appreciate. The MDGs have proven useful in sparking public awareness on poverty and other key development concerns, and generating consensus around the urgent need to address them. Against the plethora of social, economic and environmental problems confronting the world’s peoples, it is but rational to identify priorities and focus efforts accordingly.

But even before rushing into a process of adopting new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the question governments and the United Nations Development Group should first answer is why, despite the popular awareness – high-level commitment, and celebrity enthusiasm generated around the MDGs – many countries still lag behind in achieving them?

The reason of course is that the MDGs are embedded within the broader context of the neoliberal restructuring of the global economy (trade and investment liberalisation, privatisation, and deregulation) which has actually worsened many human development indicators in many regions. Unbridled market liberalisation has weakened many governments’ capacity to ensure the progressive realisation of human rights, and has undermined even the most modest development goals; the MDGs.

As Charles Gore, former least developed country (LDC) specialist at the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) acknowledged, “the MDGs have... been embedded within a particular approach to national policy which assumes that global integration, through the Washington Consensus policy package, together with good governance and more social spending, will lead to substantial poverty reduction and improved human development. But these policies have not been able to generate sufficient productive employment opportunities and livelihoods in poor countries, and they have been unable to build up those countries’ productive base and thus allow them to become less dependent on aid”.

RIO+20 7
Science and politics at Rio and beyond

Melissa Leach and Adrian Ely
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The discussions at Rio+20 and the challenges of devising a post-Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) framework raise important questions about the roles of science and politics in seeking sustainability.

Rio will underscore the importance of the MDGs, but propose that the post-2015 agenda moves towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that, according to the June 2nd text ‘should be action-oriented, concise and easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries while taking into account different national realities, capacities and development priorities and respecting national policies and priorities’.

The new framework should, many argue, be guided by emerging earth system science that points to a ‘safe operating space for humanity’, within which our global patterns of development should be steered. The ICSU Forum at PUC has been discussing many of these issues, and will continue to do so in plenary and side events tomorrow. However, combining this evidence on ‘planetary boundaries’ with the urgent and varying needs of localities and communities around the world requires serious political debate and negotiation. There is still little clarity on what the post-MDG agenda should involve, who should set future goals, and how they can be realised in practice. The co-chairs of the committee appointed by Ban Ki Moon to oversee the post-MDG process, David Cameron and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono should realise that this is where the really knotty politics begin.

The global community may agree to ambitious goals, for instance on energy, water, food security and oceans, but, especially in low-income and BRICS countries, anxiety is already emerging about how to share the burden of meeting such goals. Whether SDGs imply the old, industrialised north putting the brakes on others’ development, while avoiding costly changes to their own lifestyles and economies, is at the centre of global political debates, as it has been in recent climate negotiations. ‘The Future We Want’ may be described in the Outcome Document from Rio but as a global community, ‘we’ must be aware of the deep implications for global justice of defining a collective future, and continue to strive for an inclusive process that recognises what many of us not just want – but need.

Even more challenging is the question of who is responsible for delivering on SDGs – at national and local levels – and the roles that institutions, and diverse forms of innovation, must play. Here, there are multiple, disputed versions of ‘sustainable development’ that imply different winners and losers. When it comes to providing modern energy services, does sustainable development mean centralised grid infrastructure powered by large scale low carbon generation? Or does it also mean experimenting with off-grid solar home systems and other micro-generation technologies? When combating hunger in various rural settings across the world, does sustainable development mean improving food security through boosting agricultural productivity, using modern plant breeding and genetic engineering to roll out technical solutions at scale? Or does it mean tackling diverse local food insecurities shaped by ecological, market, social and institutional contexts, through farmer-participatory approaches?

In reality, these choices are not clear-cut. SDGs must leave room for multiple, diverse approaches. Not all of these can be pursued in equal measure, because there are inevitably trade-offs and competition between different alternatives. Recent work at the STEPS Centre, together with colleagues at the Stockholm Resilience Centre and the Tellus Institute, argues that any process towards implementing SDGs must be guided by specific consideration of the directions of change, the diversity of possible approaches and their appropriateness to different contexts, and their distributional effects – who will gain or lose. Implementation must focus on linking global goals with local needs, and linking top-down policies with bottom-up grassroots initiatives. Scientific evidence and technical considerations can play a vital role in informing how our patterns of development need to change at a global level, but resolving the trade-offs between different approaches to implementing these changes is necessarily a game of politics, to be played out through the interactions of ministers and local government, corporations and businesses but also – importantly – citizens and users, NGOs and people’s movements. Inclusive, democratic politics that respect the principles of direction, diversity and distribution will be critical if SDGs are genuinely to build towards sustainable, fair futures.
Population growth was widely discussed at Rio 20 years ago. It was clearly recognised that each additional person, rich or poor, increased the human impact on the planet and reduced everyone else’s ‘fair share’ of finite and dwindling natural resources. It is one of the two great drivers, alongside consumption, of all our environmental and resource problems. Indeed Maurice Strong, Secretary-General of the first Rio Earth Summit, stated bluntly that: “Either we reduce our numbers voluntarily, or nature will do it for us brutally”.

Yet in developing countries, good voluntary family planning and women’s education and empowerment programmes are the ultimate ‘win, win, win’ for all sustainable development efforts. They: improve mother and child health, notably decrease the incidence of child stunting with its grim life-long legacy; reduce poverty; reduce maternal mortality; free women to strengthen civil society; improve the prospects for better education and thus economic development; reduce health costs; ease the pressure on Finance Ministries to provide ever more basic infrastructure for ever rising numbers, thus releasing funds for infrastructure and service improvements; reduce environmental damage such as deforestation for firewood or farming; reduce soil erosion and desertification; reduce demand for food and oil imports, thus increasing food and energy security; slow aquifer depletion and increase water availability per person; reduce un- and under-employment; and so on, across the board.

Equally important, non-coercive population stabilisation and reduction policies in developed countries would reduce: their excessive resource-consumption; their CO₂ and waste generation; the growing mismatch between the worlds of finance and bio-physical reality; their own unemployment rates and internal social stresses; and the pressure on their own natural resources such as water and energy. They would also slow the rate of sea-level rise, and chemical or pathogenic pollution.

In short, as our Patron TV naturalist Sir David Attenborough says: “Every environmental and resource problem is easier to solve with fewer people, and becomes harder – and ultimately impossible – with ever more”.

Thus it is clear that the problem of population growth, and its solution through family planning and women’s empowerment, are relevant to every theme discussed so far for the SDGs. Whichever are finally selected to succeed the MDGs in 2015, they will most likely be far more effective if the global population can be stabilised near the bottom end of the UN’s projected range for 2050 at 8.1 billion, rather than the top at 10.6 billion.

The Vatican will, of course, oppose all this for ideological reasons, because of their monstrous doctrine on contraception. But for all the rest of us, who are aware of how unsustainable our present world is and are deeply concerned at the world our children will inherit, population and family planning must be a Rio priority. Can the Conference break the taboo and rise to the challenge? ■
In the run-up to Rio+20, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were originally expected to be defined before the start of the meeting of more than 100 Heads of State and governments from 20-22 June 2012. However, by the start of the fourth round of negotiations in Rio de Janeiro this week, aspirations for SDGs have now dropped to mere hopes to launch a process for the eventual determination of the SDGs.

Of the ten possible paragraphs being considered for inclusion in Section B on the SDGs, only three paragraphs are agreed. And one of those paragraphs is offset by another version with numerous brackets, indicating it is not yet agreed. The other paragraphs are also contested with bracketed text, which illustrates the sharp divide in opinion between States – especially between the G77 and a handful of developed States.

Developing countries are tending to favour a more general text that will guide a process to define the SDGs and be initiated sometime after Rio+20. They are seeking to lay some basic ground rules, so that SDGs become a set of easily understood, aspirational goals. Little attention has been given by any State to ensure that the SDGs have the ambition which human rights defenders seek to instill the SDGs with a rights-based approach. In summary, those within the G77 seek to maintain the focus and consistency with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), conserve the consistency with the declarations and instruments established at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, and focus on poverty eradication and other priority measures to achieve equity in development among all countries.

While there are some common agreements among countries on the aspirational nature of the SDGs, most developed parties have differing viewpoints from the developing countries. The developed States are seeking more clarification about the goals and are urging for specification in any written text emerging from Rio+20. These States see the SDGs as universal goals on a specified number of areas of concern that have measurable criteria, and are agreed upon on the basis of a process initiated by the Secretary-General. On this latter point, the G77 seeks to initiate a more State-driven process. At the last round of negotiations, States traded conflicting views about the relationship between the SDGs and MDGs, leaving a major question mark over the process for determining SDGs, which is now unlikely to be answered in Rio de Janeiro. No agreement on this issue was reached at the third round of informals in New York, with the Co-Chairs, who had opted for the Secretary-General’s leadership, recognising that there was a significant divergence of views.

Another point of continuing contention is whether priorities should be specified by selecting some of the twenty-five thematic areas mentioned prior in section V, subsection A, which lists diverse concerns ranging from water and energy, to Africa and climate change. Developing States thought such specification was premature, while developed States appeared to have prepared criteria for definition and measurement that they wish to be included. Again, no agreement was reached during the last round of negotiations and significant differences of opinion remain.

Member States are trying to bridge these remaining disagreements in informal ‘Contact Groups’ during the final round of negotiations in Rio de Janeiro. SDGs were the first item on the agenda for the discussions scheduled at RioCentro. This Contact Group, however, also had to deal with climate change, water, chemicals, sustainable consumption and production, and means of implementation. A daunting task to say the least.

Despite the fact that the text on SDGs remains peppered with brackets, the Secretary-General of the Conference, H.E. Sha Zukang, was nevertheless hopeful that agreement could be reached just in time for world leaders to consider it when they start arriving on 20th June for the high level segment of the long and ongoing Rio+20 process.
News from Cluster Group on SDGs

Rishikesh Bhandary
Tufts University

The cluster group on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) inched forward as negotiators discussed possible ways to launch the process for generating the Goals. While certain parties were eager to kick things off straight after Rio itself by awarding the Secretary General a mandate to conduct a process on the SDGs, others were more hesitant. These parties argued for an intergovernmental format with the General Assembly being the launch pad and the body that endorses the Goals. Apart from inevitable delay in proceedings the latter option would cause, concerns were raised about the limited involvement of stakeholders in a purely intergovernmental process and whether it would have enough ownership of various implementation agencies.

The facilitator indicated that a potential way forward could be to model the process on the Transitional Committee of the Green Climate Fund, with a regionally balanced committee of parties producing a proposal for the General Assembly to consider. While this met with immediate push back from a few parties, with some questioning the appropriateness of the format, it nonetheless offers a clear model that can be built upon. The cluster facilitator will continue to hold consultations on these matters and is expected to introduce some new text imminently.

The procedural and legal questions were indicators of larger problems: primarily the trust deficit and lack of ambition that seems to pervade the Rio+20 process. Shadows of the impending conclusion of the MDGs in 2015 loomed large, along with the possibility of SDGs taking the attention away from more general people-oriented development goals. While the Conference name (UN Conference on Sustainable Development) may have changed from that of 20 years ago (UN Conference on Environment and Development), today’s session on SDGs indicates that many parties are yet to reflect this evolution.

Side Event:
Multi-stakeholder engagement in the institutional framework for sustainable development and compendium of commitments

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, Stakeholder Forum and UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS) invite you to this important side event

- **Time**: Thursday, 14 June, 15:30 - 17:00
- **Venue**: Rio Centro, T-3
- **Co-moderators**: Jeffery Huffines, CIVICUS and Hamish Jenkins, UN-NGLS
- **Panellists**:
  - Farooq Ullah, Stakeholder Forum
  - Suzanne Salz, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability
  - Pat Mooney, ETC Group
  - Yoke Ling Chee, Third World Network (invited)
  - Joseph Foti, World Resources Institute
  - Paula Caballero, Colombian Mission (invited)

This side event is the third in a series that will examine the representation, participation and accountability of civil society and Major Groups in informing, monitoring and implementing intergovernmental policy-making in a reformed institutional framework for sustainable development that embraces multi-level governance. Speakers will evaluate best practices of public participation in other multilateral bodies as well as civil society proposals not yet implemented.

**About the organisers**:
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation is an international alliance of civil society working to strengthen citizen action and civil society throughout the world, with members and partners in around 100 countries worldwide.

Stakeholder Forum is an international organisation working to enhance open, accountable and participatory international decision-making on sustainable development through enhancing the involvement of stakeholders in intergovernmental processes.

The United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service is an inter-agency programme of the United Nations mandated to promote and develop constructive relations between the UN and civil society organisations.
Climate change and sustainable development: clarifying linkages

Achieving sustainable development entails making progress on the three integrated strands of the social, the environmental and the economic. Climate change and its impacts touch on all three dimensions – causing environmental damage and degradation; increasing social vulnerability, and exacerbating economic instability.

The Rio+20 Conference gives us a chance to address two key issues – reinventing our economy and strengthening our international institutions to support and ensure sustainable development. Our ability to build a truly green economy depends on preventing climate disruptions, and dealing with unavoidable impacts of climate change, including social, environmental and economic resilience. Both adaptation and mitigation of the impacts of climate change form an integral part of building green economies across the globe so that it actually does become a means to achieving sustainable development.

There are significant concerns that a narrow focus on a green economy will result in the loss of one of the main qualities of the Rio process – an integrated approach to sustainable development – and its focus on the three dimensions. There are also fears that a focus on a green economy is the next step in a global march to further commercialise and commoditise natural resources and human relations, to the detriment of those who are already most vulnerable. Ignoring the climate change agenda and not treating it as an integral part of the sustainable development will only reinforce this concern and further exacerbate the challenges faced.

Within the local context, the long years of treating sustainable development as a separate strain of development, removed from the mainstream economy, requires serious reorientation and an urgent rethink. As part of this rethink, nation states need to reassess the challenges and vulnerabilities their economies face – affecting them environmentally, socially and economically. The devastations of the impacts of climate change – current and future – will need to be counted in the core list of these challenges that we face while we plan and build a green economy.

The window to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions to avoid catastrophic and irreversible runaway climate change is also rapidly closing. Shrinking access of communities to diminishing natural resources, over-utilisation of resources, unsustainable consumption patterns, and the increasingly fragile and unstable global financial systems are together increasing the vulnerabilities of a large portion of the world’s population, exposing them to worsening economic, social, environmental, and climatic impacts. These issues lie at the core of the sustainability agenda that Rio must address and are reflected in the various issues and themes that the process seeks to negotiate.

Globally – and as the consequences of climate change become more visible – freshwater scarcity, access, and sanitation are increasingly issues of concern. Clearly, protecting and restoring water resources are crucial for environmental stability and sustainable development, including poverty eradication, health, agriculture, food security, rural development and hydropower.

Increasing, energy access and security within an equitable green economy is not only necessary but also entirely doable. The urgency comes from the climate crisis and the current scale of energy deprivation, while the opportunity presents itself in the existing and prospective new technologies, with the potential to facilitate the necessary energy transformation.

The green economy will not be green if it is built on nuclear and fossil fuel-dependent energy infrastructure. Subsidising the oil, gas and coal industries worldwide demonstrates that nations and the world are not currently financing deployment of sustainable, green and renewable energy. The establishment of an equitable green economy must be accompanied by the removal of fossil fuel subsidies, and other subsidies that harm the environment, distort markets and create barriers to sustainable development.

Technology development and deployment within an equitable green economy would require policy with focus on climate adaptation and dissemination of green technologies that incorporate goals for sustainable development, and principles aimed at identifying the range of diverse technologies required for a green economy, and facilitation of the maintenance and promotion of environmentally-sound indigenous technologies.

Rio was the birthplace of the UNFCCC. Now the world’s eyes are on Rio once again to seek further ambition and direction in order to build consistency, momentum and comprehensiveness across the multilateral framework.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>14/6/12</td>
<td>11:30 - 13:00</td>
<td>RioCentro - T9</td>
<td>The need for a rights-based approach to sustainable development</td>
<td>Centre for Ethics and Value Inquiry (CEVI)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11:30 - 13:00</td>
<td>RioCentro - T3</td>
<td>SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES 2050</td>
<td>Northern Alliance for Sustainability</td>
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<td></td>
<td>13:00 - 14:45</td>
<td>UNEP Pavilion Auditorium</td>
<td>Driving innovation toward Green Economy: Lessons Learned and Recommendations from the Field in Asia and the Pacific</td>
<td>UNEP</td>
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<td>13:30 - 15:00</td>
<td>RioCentro T-6</td>
<td>The Technology Economy? Know-how, Know-what, Know-why</td>
<td>ETC Group (Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>15:30 - 17:00</td>
<td>RioCentro T-3</td>
<td>Multi-stakeholder Engagement in IFSD &amp; Compendium of Commitments</td>
<td>CIVICUS - World Alliance for Citizen Participation</td>
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<td>15:30 - 16:00</td>
<td>RioCentro P-3</td>
<td>Press Conference by speakers from Major Groups organizations</td>
<td>Earth Media/ Rio+20 Civil Society-Media Liaison Team</td>
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<td></td>
<td>15:00 - 16:45</td>
<td>UNEP Pavilion Auditorium</td>
<td>Greening the Blue World: Green Economy Approach for Oceans, Coasts and SIDS</td>
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<td>15:30 - 17:00</td>
<td>RioCentro – T8</td>
<td>Energy and Sustainable Development</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
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<td></td>
<td>17:00 - 19:00</td>
<td>UNEP Pavilion Auditorium</td>
<td>Progress and Barriers for meeting Environmental Goals</td>
<td>UNEP</td>
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<td>17:30 - 19:00</td>
<td>RioCentro – T9</td>
<td>Implementation of the SEEA: the international statistical standard for environmental-economic accounting</td>
<td>Institute of Geography and Statistics</td>
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<td>17:30 - 19:00</td>
<td>RioCentro – T10</td>
<td>Learning from the MDGs: SDGs within a transformative post-2015 development agenda</td>
<td>Ibon International</td>
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<td></td>
<td>18:15 - 20:00</td>
<td>Pontifical Catholic University</td>
<td>Future Earth: research for global sustainability Interdisciplinary scientific discussions, and dialogues between scientists, policymakers, Major Groups and other stakeholders</td>
<td>ICUS</td>
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<td></td>
<td>19:30 - 21:00</td>
<td>RioCentro P3A</td>
<td>National Sustainable Development Strategies-What’s Their Future Role?</td>
<td>Liechtenstein</td>
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<tr>
<td>15/6/12</td>
<td>09:00 – 11:00</td>
<td>Rio Centro T-3</td>
<td>Green Economy and Trade – Assessing Risks and Opportunities</td>
<td>International Trade Centre (ITC) – Lead partner, UNEP, International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11:30 - 13:00</td>
<td>RioCentro T-8</td>
<td>Social justice for future generations</td>
<td>World Future Council</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11:30 - 13:00</td>
<td>Rio Centro T-4</td>
<td>Green Jobs: A Chance for Youth!</td>
<td>UNEP</td>
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<td></td>
<td>12:00 – 13:00</td>
<td>UNEP Pavilion Auditorium</td>
<td>Addressing the Short Lived Climate Pollutant Challenge: The New Climate and Clean Air Coalition to Reduce Short lived Climate Pollutants</td>
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<td>13:30 - 15:00</td>
<td>RioCentro T-2</td>
<td>The Future We Want: Biodiversity in the Sustainable Development Goals</td>
<td>Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)</td>
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<td>13:30 - 15:00</td>
<td>RioCentro P3-E</td>
<td>How to create an equitable and sustainable green economy</td>
<td>Danish 92 Group</td>
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<td>13:30 - 15:00</td>
<td>RioCentro T-4</td>
<td>Securing a sustainable and equitable future for all post-Rio+20</td>
<td>BioRegional Development Group</td>
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<td></td>
<td>15:00 – 16:45</td>
<td>UNEP Pavilion Auditorium</td>
<td>Financing a Green Economy</td>
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<td>15:30 - 17:00</td>
<td>RioCentro T-6</td>
<td>Connecting the dots: science, the IPCC and the policy picture</td>
<td>Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)</td>
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<td>17:30 - 19:00</td>
<td>RioCentro T-8</td>
<td>Transboundary Waters, Climate Change and Good Governance</td>
<td>WWF Indonesia</td>
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<td>15:30 - 17:00</td>
<td>RioCentro T-9</td>
<td>What Comes Next? An Interactive Dialogue on Youth Movements Beyond Rio</td>
<td>SustainUs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>19:30 - 21:00</td>
<td>RioCentro T-3</td>
<td>International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions (AICESIS)</td>
<td>AICESIS</td>
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</table>
The Cluster Group on Green Economy began negotiations on section III and by the end of the day had made it to paragraph 52 (!). Discussions are moderately slow as a few strong voices focused on the minutiae of a couple of words per paragraph. This is to be expected, being the way in which final consensus is reached in outcome documents of this nature - so much rests on the meaning and interpretation of each specific word.

Less expected, however, are the detailed deliberations that have been taking place in relation to specific Principles of the Rio Declaration; namely 2 and 12 (but it also points to the broader issue of naming Principles elsewhere in the text and other multilateral fora). Some delegations are pushing to have part of the principle referenced in the body of the text, however as a result of some slight paraphrasing, other delegations expressed concern that the meaning of the Principle as originally agreed is lost.

In these rooms, language and meaning are paramount because these paragraphs, when interpreted, can determine how countries turn the words into action through strategies of implementation. Looking ahead to this process of action on the ground and what the text itself will mandate, delegations are keen to protect the right to interpret the text in the way that most benefits themselves.

In other news...

Outreach has heard that Brazil has convened a ‘non-meeting’ meeting on energy, in addition to the cluster group meeting on this subject, to discuss the state of the world’s energy situation. Outreach understands that invited delegations included the EU, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), US, Venezuela, Egypt, China, Algeria, and Saudi Arabia, amongst others. New Zealand, on hearing about the meeting at the very last minute (having not been invited) managed to slip in as the door was closing. Outreach eagerly awaits further news on the ‘non-meeting’ meeting and how this will be feeding into the official process.

Outreach is made possible by the support of