

If the outcome document of Rio+20 is to be seen as “visionary, looking-forward, and action-oriented,” adopting a “Rio+20 Mandate” in June 2012 would be a big step in the right direction. This could be realised if a broad consensus on the concepts of SDGs and its development process were to be reached beforehand.

Post-Rio Process

After Rio, concrete goals, targets, and indicators, as well as the link between global and national goals need to be identified. Building on **good practice models** for achieving

SDGs would help bring about specific goals and targets and help countries develop their support for SDGs. Developing countries would benefit with such experiments with appropriate assistance to help with implementation. An appropriate mechanism should be built to lead, monitor, and review this process, as this would help create a unified post-2015 development process. Box 2 summarises key points of ongoing discussions on a potential roadmap to develop SDGs among informal consultations, UN-led processes, and the GSP report (2012).

Box 2 A potential roadmap to develop SDGs by 2015

1. Establish an expert mechanism by the UN Secretary-General to elaborate and refine the goals.
2. Select some overarching themes such as food security and energy and set up a few test-drive groups of countries with different circumstances or capabilities to trial some of these targets, take measurements, then share the experiences.
3. Develop measurements or indicators beyond GDP, taking into account the result of these test-drives.
4. Adopt SDGs at the 68th UN General Assembly in 2013.
5. Integrate SDGs into a post-2015 development agenda.

Source: Informal Consultations on SDGs at the Initial Discussion on the Zero-Draft. NY, 27 January 2012, and GSP report (2012).

06 Conclusion

The world cannot afford to wait for actions to tackle the broader challenges threatening sustainable development, and poverty will not be overcome without strong political will, suitable policies and effective mechanisms to ensure

implementation for addressing these challenges. A set of SDGs would offer a more comprehensive framework to respond to these needs while also envisioning poverty eradication as an overarching goal; therefore adoption of an ambitious SDG mandate at Rio+20 is critical in order to realign and reignite worldwide efforts towards creating the future we want.

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IGES Rio+20 Issue Brief **vol.1**

What are Sustainable Development Goals?

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Key Messages

- 01 This issue brief sets out the need for policy makers to define a clear mandate and process for developing a set of universal SDGs at Rio+20. Doing this will reaffirm political commitment and foster further efforts towards achieving sustainable development.
- 02 Voluntary commitments from both developed and developing countries are crucial in order for SDGs to be promoted based upon common goals, shared interests and respective capacities.
- 03 SDGs reflect the lessons learnt from MDGs, and the SDG process could be integrated into a single unified process for all countries within the post-2015 development agenda.
- 04 SDGs holistically address economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development as part of a broader framework dealing with overarching issues such as poverty eradication, but with enhanced environmental considerations.
- 05 Developing regionally and locally relevant good practice models for each SDG goal would help countries develop their support for SDGs.

01 Introduction

This brief, which addresses issues surrounding **the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** proposed by Columbia, Guatemala, and Peru during the Rio+20 processes, aims to remind policymakers and other stakeholders of the importance of reaching a solid outcome at Rio+20, as well as for the future. The following provides a summary of ongoing discussions and informal consultations concerning SDGs, and expounds on IGES' views for a mandate and process for developing a set of universal SDGs.

02 Why we need a more comprehensive sustainable development framework

Two decades ago in 1992, a historic meeting of governments, business organisations and civil society organisations laid down a commitment to achieve sustainable development, named the Rio Declaration. But it wasn't just any declaration; it heralded a whole new paradigm that embraced integrating economic growth, social equality and environmental sustainability (UNGA 1992). The world reaffirmed and further refined these precepts in Johannesburg in 2002 where the "overarching objectives of, and essential requirements for, sustainable development" were highlighted as: poverty eradication, sustainable consumption and production, and environmental protection (UN 2002). New approaches continue to offer a better understanding of sustainable development—such as the growing role of scientific knowledge and technologies which have articulated indicators such as planetary boundaries, the ecological footprint, and other measures of human impact on the planet. Despite the progress, however, a chasm still exists between past words and actual deeds. Why is this so?

The chief reasons are a lack, at all levels, of prioritising sustainable development, limited access to financial resources, weak commercial viability of the required investments, inadequate and inappropriate human, financial, technical and institutional capacity dedicated to implementation and evaluation, limited public awareness and a lack of change in lifestyles (UNGA 2011b). The world is facing broader and ever more urgent issues which may both jeopardise the options available for meeting the basic human needs, and eradicating poverty and threaten efforts to achieve sustainable development. These include climate change, energy security, increasing unemployment and food prices, a growing rich-poor gap at both international and national levels, and an increasing number of natural and man-made disasters. At the operational level, it has become clear that a new gauge of sustainable development other than the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and improved institutional governance are necessary to effectively monitor, review, and manage implementation. Further, the modality of international cooperation surrounding sustainable development has dramatically changed—from North-South to a new type of collective action involving all countries and stakeholders, such as South-South and triangular cooperation. Public-private partnerships are also becoming crucial for solving common problems and advancing shared interests (GSP 2012).

These changes and challenges within the global architecture have prompted society collectively to prepare a new sustainable

development index based on a new set of indicators. Of the broader challenges threatening the world's sustainable development path, poverty eradication should remain as an overarching goal of SDGs. **The primary objective of SDGs is to revisit this vision while reaffirming the past political commitments of all actors as well as ensuring tangible actions to take place towards sustainable development.**

03 Linkages to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

SDGs have received criticism due to their similarities with the post-2015 development agenda, which includes MDGs and post-MDG processes. MDGs, despite their notable achievements to date, namely, improvements in the poverty level, increased aid from industrialised countries, and promotion of the various forms of stakeholder participation (UNGA 2011a; UNDP 2011), have not escaped criticism either. They are charged with 1) neglecting issues in developed countries, 2) not considering the real needs in recipient countries, particularly those of marginalised populations, and 3) utilising a donor-driven design, which led to 1) and 2) above (UNDP 2011; Holland 2008). Unfortunately, the current MDG framework, which includes potential post-MDGs, cannot or would not fully address emerging and/or urgent issues, such as climate change, energy security, loss of biodiversity, disaster preparedness and resilience (see Table 1). 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 (ESCAP 2010). 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** (UNGA 2011a). Based upon the experiences of MDGs, ensuring **multi-layer, multi-stakeholder participation** throughout the development process of SDGs is the key for successful implementation (UNGA 2011a; UNDP 2011).

Table 1. Millennium Development Goals

Goal 1	Eradicate Extreme Hunger and Poverty
Goal 2	Achieve Universal Primary Education
Goal 3	Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women
Goal 4	Reduce Child Mortality
Goal 5	Improve Maternal Health
Goal 6	Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases
Goal 7	Ensure Environmental Sustainability
Goal 8	Develop a Global Partnership for Development

04 SDGs as part of a post-2015 development agenda

Integrating the SDG processes and other initiatives into a single unified process would be highly advantageous as this would set out a clear post-2015 framework. 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)** (GSP 2012). 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 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPol) helps identify the potential scope of SDGs. Table 2 shows the tentative blueprint for the scope of SDGs based on these existing documents, but embraces the broader challenges as well as emerging possibilities (UNGA 1982; UN 2002).

Table 2. Tentative blueprint for the scope of SDGs

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)		
Agenda 21 and JPol	Overarching goal	Poverty eradication , environmental sustainability, sustainable consumption and production
	Dimensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-carbon economy • Social foundation • Environment sustainability
	Cross-cutting themes and approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development • Sustainable development in a globalizing world • Health and sustainable development • Means of implementation • Institutional framework for sustainable development • Gender and equality etc.
	Priority areas	Food, water, sanitation, access to energy, oceans and seas, forests, desertification, health, education, shelter, etc.
Broader challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change • Energy security • Rise in unemployment and food price • Inequality between the rich and the poor both at global and national levels • An increasing number of natural and man-made disasters, etc. 	
Emerging possibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green jobs and social inclusion • Resilience and disaster preparedness • Science and Technology • South-South and triangular cooperation, public-private partnerships • Innovative financial mechanisms • Strengthened institutional framework for sustainable development, etc. 	

Source: Agenda 21 and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and supplemented by the author.

Ensuring **equity and participation** is essential for advancing the transition to sustainable development across countries, societies and within individuals, while building **resilience** against natural and man-made hazards. Further, the three dimensions of sustainable development help reduce risk and vulnerability to environmental, economic, and social risks (IGES 2011).

As stated in JPol, **an effective institutional framework at all levels** is the key to fully implementing the world's commitments to achieve sustainable development and meeting emerging sustainable development challenges (UN, 2002). A global mechanism for periodic follow-ups—including reporting and monitoring progress at the operational level—could help coordinate efforts towards achieving the SDGs (for example, via creation of a Sustainable Development Council) as well as improve coherence and mainstream sustainable development at the sub-national, national, and international levels (GSP 2012).

05 Anticipated roadmap for developing universal SDGs

What SDG mandate and processes should be established at Rio+20 and beyond? So far, several options for Rio+20 deliverables have been articulated during ongoing informal consultations on SDGs organised by the Government of Columbia. Box 1 summarises objectives, characteristics, and a scope of SDGs underlined by these consultations so far.

Options for Rio+20 Deliverables

(1) **Most ambitious:** The adoption of the so-called "**Rio+20 Mandate**", which includes agreements on political

commitments for global goals, guiding characteristics for the goals, cross-cutting themes for the goals, identification of potential goals and a Post-Rio Process.

- (2) *Least ambitious:* The agreement on launching a Post-Rio Process on SDGs.
- (3) *Modest:* The agreement on launching a Post-Rio Process on SDGs with the identification of some priority areas (such as food security and energy) and implementing test-drives immediately after Rio.

Box 1 Objectives, characteristics, and a scope of SDGs

- **Objectives**
 - Address broader challenges threatening sustainable development;
 - Reaffirm the past political commitments of all actors and ensure tangible actions towards sustainable development;
- **Characteristics**
 - Action-oriented;
 - Complementary to MDGs;
 - Strongly linked to Agenda 21 and JPol;
 - Universal in application, but allowing for national and regional circumstances and respective capabilities;
 - Voluntary application, in keeping with national realities, priorities, and capabilities;
- **Scope**
 - Poverty eradication as an overarching goal;
 - Address economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development;
 - Enable articulation of the nexus between the different issue areas covered by the SDGs;
 - Time bound and measurable, with targets and indicators;
 - Few in number and easy to communicate and understand.

Source: Informal Consultations on SDGs (January 2012) and supplemented by the author.