



UNEP

United Nations Environment Programme

# PERSPECTIVES

ISSUE NO 12

## **“TOWARDS A GLOBAL AGENDA OF SUSTAINABILITY AND EQUITY: CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT FOR THE FUTURE WE WANT”**

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### **Convergence between MDGs and SDGs: a huge and necessary challenge**

At the Rio+20 Summit the United Nations General Assembly (GA) resolved to put in place a set of Sustainable Development Goals (§ 245-251 of “The Future We Want”). For this purpose, an Open Working Group for Sustainable Development Goals was established on 22nd January 2013 by decision 67/555 (see A/67/L.48/rev.1) of the GA. Since that decision, several meetings of the Open Working Group have taken place at which numerous representatives from governments and civil society have expressed the view that the post 2015- and the SDG-framework should be merged into a single process. Although by no means a simple task, the authors of this article are in support of such a merger, arguing it is necessary to fully transform the development agenda, putting environmental sustainability at its core, and avoid the development of “green MDGs” that simply enable business-as-usual. The predominant focus of development cooperation on a “trade and aid” agenda must be replaced by policies that put equity, solidarity and justice at the forefront, addressing the root causes of unsustainable consumption and production patterns, and transforming them into sustainable lifestyles and livelihoods that benefit all. A paradigm shift is thus needed that replaces the mainly growth-based economic model with a new model that aims to achieve sustainable and equitable economies and societies worldwide, and ensures greater public participation in decision-making, in line with Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration from 1992.

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## Development versus Environment?

Development (in the sense of opening up opportunities for human well-being) and the environment are inter-dependent. All economies rely on the use of natural resources. However for many of us, the circumstances of living in a modern and industrialised environment create the illusion of our separateness from nature. Often it is not understood that a damaged environment and insufficient management of natural resources pose a threat to society, nor is this fact properly considered in analyses provided by scientists

for development policies. Frequently, economists assume “nature” is an externality that comes at no cost and therefore need not be accounted for when calculating prices for goods and services, considering only the costs of labour and capital. Such an approach is tantamount to estimating the expenses of baking a pie based only on the price of the oven and the cost of the cook.

***The conventional development paradigm is that poverty leads to environmental degradation, so international cooperation promotes development models worldwide. By contrast, the sustainability paradigm tells us this push for industrial and export-oriented development leads to irreversible environmental degradation, which leads to even more structural poverty...***

It should also be recognised that the dominant development model is largely focused on the accumulation of material wealth. Genuine development should lead to well-being and happiness, without dependence on limitless exploitation of the Earth’s resources. A well cared-for environment is crucial for sustainability and survival of humankind.

As ecological economist and Catalan Professor Joan Martinez Alier (2002) points out, an “Environmentalism of the Poor” has evolved among (often vulnerable) peoples worldwide, whose lives depend directly on nature, and who are affected by pressure on natural resources and associated declining possibilities for achieving well-being for future generations. The challenge is therefore not simply to translate the externalities of the present period into monetary value (as so-called Green Economists would argue), but to recognise that those externalities represent serious obstacles to further development. In this sense, decreased access to satisfiers of basic needs (food, water, health, fresh air, etc) can be seen as an infringement of human rights.

The development of sustainable societies and economies requires profound transformations in the fundamental values and organizing principles of society, namely, new values and development paradigms that emphasize well being and material sufficiency for all, human solidarity and greatly enhanced global equity, re-affirmation of being part of nature, and ecological sustainability. The current discourse on the Green Economy should not be used to “green-wash” existing “brown” economies. A “green” economy that continues to focus on a singular growth-driven, high technology, intellectual property rights-dominated system, prioritizing free-market values over environmental and social considerations, will not really help the cause of sustainable development. What is needed is a vision of a nested system of community, sub-regional, and regional sustainable economies, in a diversity of settings, built on a foundation of integrity, accountability, subsidiarity and equitable distribution of power and benefits. The core idea is that all economies be made sustainable, replacing a singular centralized and dominating global economy. This must be the ambition of the SDGs.

Current international cooperation policies are often focused on delivering development assistance to poor countries. In the conventional development paradigm, development aid through financial transfers is seen as a moral obligation on the part of rich countries to the ‘disadvantaged’ developing world. A detailed analysis of global financial and material flows reveals however that there is also a flow from countries that are rich in natural resources towards industrialised countries. Dutch economist Lou Keune calculated the monetary value of this so-called “ecological debt”, concluding that the ‘overshoot’ of industrialised countries amounts to \$5.655 billion a year, roughly 100 times the amount of official development aid



(ODA is \$56 billion dollars a year). While this calculation is admittedly uncertain given the difficulties associated with assigning monetary value to nature, it does illustrate the degree to which financial and material flows from South to North exceed those from North to South. What becomes evident is an absurd situation of “reversed development aid” that allows the Global North to maintain high lifestyles through the excessive consumption of natural resources (“environment”) of the Global South, which is left without sufficient access to resources for its own development. It is justifiable to ask: “Where is the international solidarity and justice here?”

Hence, in rough terms, for every dollar of development aid given, \$100 worth of (undervalued) natural resources is returned. Rich countries also benefit from the relatively inexpensive occupation of enormous tracts of land in the South for production and consumption, and impunity for the environmental and social damage inflicted by their industrial activities. In order to achieve fair and sustainable development worldwide, the accumulation of the current and historical ecological debt by the industrialised world must come to a halt. This requires admitting that the increasing gap between rich and poor is the result of an active process that is often exacerbated by the current economic system and its orientation toward economic growth for its own sake, and putting an end to transfers of money and measures designed to stimulate trade. More emphasis is needed on redistribution of wealth and environmental and climate ‘space’ within planetary limits, if global and national policies are to tackle inequalities.

## From MDGs to SDGs

The MDGs have proven to be an important tool for building international/global coordination capacity between states and other development actors. They have succeeded in bringing together public, private and political support for global poverty reduction and provided an effective tool for stimulating the production of new poverty-related data and additional aid commitments. In some countries, the MDGs have provided means for civil society and other development actors to participate more effectively. It is important that the post-2015 process, both in its design and implementation, builds on this momentum to further strengthen the voice of civil society organisations at all levels.

***For the development of the SDGs we need a shared and bold vision of just, equitable and sustainable societies in harmony with nature in which every person and community can realise human rights, based on common responsibilities, wellbeing and a life free from poverty and exploitation.***

Nevertheless, the MDGs have failed to address the root causes of poverty and of the lack of progress on realising human rights. Nor have they supported a trend towards ecological unsustainability. On the contrary, the ‘MDG approach’, has reduced the concept of ‘development’ to increased GDP-growth, placing trust in the long-defunct trickle-down effect.<sup>6 7</sup> If one scrutinizes the results of the MDGs in fact, it becomes obvious that improvements, where they have occurred, have fallen short of both ambitions and needs. This is arguably due in part to the “Business as Usual” approach to global economic policies, which, as stated above, has led to an active process of enrichment of some part of society on the one hand, and the impoverishment of other sectors on the other. What is called for is therefore a fundamental paradigm shift in our economic logic and actions, to achieve sustainability, equity and well being at a global level. Poverty eradication in the Global South moreover requires an acknowledgement of the overuse of natural resources in the Global North. Northern countries need to focus on policies designed to reduce (extreme) material wealth, in order to protect and safeguard resources for the well-being and development of the poorer populations and future generations. The Beyond 2015 European Task Force (Concord) clearly promotes this new discourse in “*Putting People and Planet First – Business as Usual is Not an Option*” (April 2013). This, we argue, is the sort of new thinking that should provide the basis for the future SDGs.



MDGs	SDGs
Development	Sustainable well-being
Focus on developing countries	Focus on all countries
Aid and Trade agenda	Human Rights, Justice, and meaningful livelihoods
No recognition of planetary boundaries	Living within the limits of the resources of one planet
Environment is seen as secondary priority, economic development first	Environment (natural resources, healthy eco systems) is basic for developing well-being

Figure: the main difference between the MDG and SDG approach

The design of a future framework for the Sustainable Development Goals is an extremely challenging task since there is such a wide variety of issues that could merit inclusion, many of them interdependent. It will be important not to be limited to an ideal 'wish list' of goals, but to really focus on key indicators and objectives for achieving sustainability worldwide. Strong visions, and the courage to identify and tackle the root causes of the challenges faced by the world today, in a comprehensive manner, are absolute requirements in this task.

## Global challenges for Sustainable Development

The most important international references in relation to Sustainable Development are reflected in two transversal documents: I) the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and II) Agenda 21: an action plan focused on social, economic and ecological problems. Both are outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro. The Brundtland report has been the basic foundation for both, providing also what today is the most common definition of Sustainable Development:

*"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."*

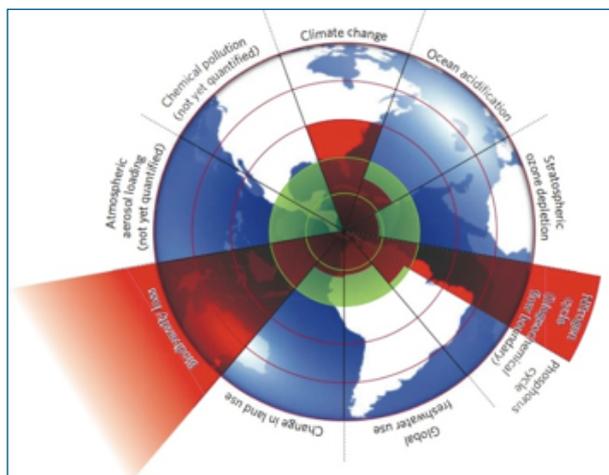
According to the same report, the above definition contains two key concepts:

*"The concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs".*

There are a number of important ideas to recall from the Brundtland-report for the future SDGs:

The earth system carrying capacity is limited. This is crucial, since science shows with increasing certainty that human society has already reached, and in some cases exceeded planetary limits.

Poverty and environment are two interdependent determinants, so if one fails, so does the other. Sustainable development implies meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to fulfil their aspirations to live in dignity. A world in which inequality is structural will always be prone to ecological and other catastrophes. "The Future We Want", the final outcome document of Rio+20 Conference reaffirms this statement.



Source: Johan Rockstrom et al, in The Nature 24 September 2009



Equity requires that natural resources need to be fairly distributed within and among nations. Meeting essential needs requires not only a new era of economic development for nations in which the majority are poor, but an assurance that those poor receive their fair share of the resources required to build and sustain their well being. An approach based on rights and justice is what sustainable development aims for. Contraction and convergence schemes for our economies are crucial for achieving equity.

Governance needs to be improved to enable the wide participation of society. Equity is dependent upon political systems that secure effective citizens' participation in decision making and greater democracy in international decision making.

Structural changes need to be made to the way we live, and exploit and use our natural resources. Sustainable global development requires that those who are more affluent adopt lifestyles within the planet's ecological boundaries - in their use of energy, for example by eliminating demand for luxury goods, and accepting and implementing strategies of 'sufficiency' rather than solely 'efficiency'.

Demographic management within the limited earth system is required. Further rapid growth in populations can increase pressure on resources and hinder improvements in living standards. Thus sustainable development can only be pursued if population size and growth are in harmony with the changing productive potential of the ecosystem.

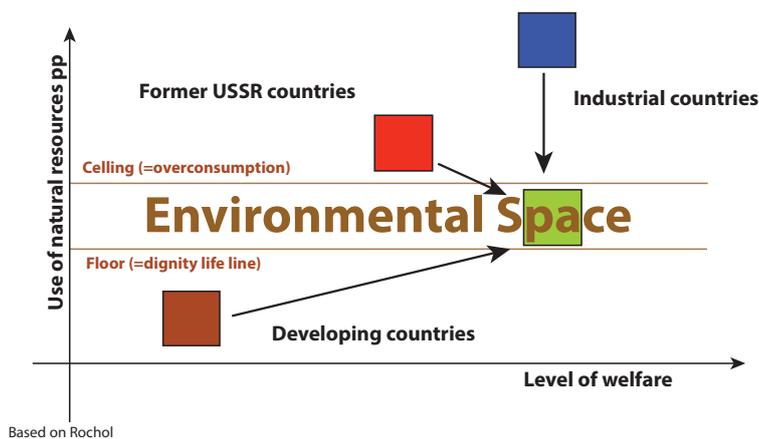
It is important to change and halt trends and policies that support unsustainable patterns of production and consumption. Our current economic system has, consistently, proven to be inappropriate for achieving sustainable development worldwide.

One of the key challenges faced today is the definition of "quality of life", since this involves not only an economic dimension but also elements of well being (for example dignity, health and respect for human rights). This means that the effective evaluation of whether or not a country has achieved its desired quality of life within planetary boundaries depends on understanding a complex combination of economic, cultural and social values. Unfortunately, as already stated, the idea that well-being, happiness and development are equated with the increasing consumption of goods and acquisition of material possessions is now globally widespread. This thinking is fuelled by both governments and the private sector: governments because they choose to measure national income by GDP figures, and are seen to be failing if this does not increase; the private sector because its *raison d'être* is continual maximisation of profit, for which it needs to produce and sell ever more, while cutting costs wherever possible, including through creating or maintaining "indecent and underpaid jobs". The role of international institutions in developing and perpetuating this model should also be analysed, as they play an important role in leveraging or hindering change. We have reached a stage today at which possession of material goods is often equated with happiness.

The current emphasis on permanent GDP growth (referred to in the Rio+20 outcome as "sustained economic growth"... ) and possession of material goods is not only entirely unsustainable but ultimately self-destructive in the long run, both in economic and environmental terms. However, many examples can be found across the world that illustrate that change is indeed possible. Bhutan for instance has been experimenting with a national indicator of "Gross National Happiness" (GNH), based on measurements of sustainability. The four pillars of the GNH are the promotion of sustainable development, preservation and integration of cultural values, conservation of the natural environment and establishment of good governance. This approach has enjoyed its share of success and failure, and although it cannot be replicated everywhere, it shows the potential for a different pathway to wellbeing. Some South American countries are also now discussing different indicators and measures of progress, and indigenous peoples and civil society groups have advocated a series of alternative measures under the general rubric of *buen vivir* (living well) that should be piloted.



When basic needs have been met, the goal of human development should primarily be one of 'being', rather than 'having' more. However, in order to bring the standard of living of peoples across the world closer together, the poorest within all countries must be empowered and enabled to produce and consume more until equity is achieved. This necessarily implies that overconsumption has to be eradicated in rich countries and in rich segments of poor countries, one of the chief tenets of the European 'degrowth' movement. Furthermore, it is of the highest importance that trends of overconsumption are not transferred to life styles in emerging economies. It is simply no longer credible to imagine that the world's wealthiest countries can continue their current patterns of consumption and production growth, whilst encouraging such patterns in the Global South.



Based on Rochol

Graphic: Contraction and convergence scheme (ANPED 2011)

Our economic system is actually based on debt, much of it accumulated through 'virtual' monetary and financial activity. It is therefore essential to bolster what is called the 'real' economy, one that exists within the limits of the planet's resources. Increasing evidence suggests that commons-based and steady-state approaches offer pathways through which the economy can be brought into line with planetary limits.

## Business as usual is not an option.

The starting point of a SDG/post-2015 framework must respect the above mentioned definition of Sustainable Development (as set out in the Brundtland Report), paying particular attention to the two key concepts of "basic needs", and "limitations of the environmental ability to meet present and future needs". The SDGs do not require new commitments, but demand ambitious means and targets, strong political leadership and the will to implement, which was agreed among nations in 1992.

Accordingly, the framework should also set out the conditions necessary for overcoming the obstacles faced by so many groups of people in participating fully in society and in political decision making processes. These obstacles are rooted in political, legal, social, cultural, economic, and other structures, manifesting themselves from the local to the international level. In addition, it is often the most voiceless groups that suffer from the accelerated impacts of environmental degradation, for example those resulting from the negative effects of climate change and biodiversity loss, demographic crises and mounting social inequality and ecological debt, all by-products of an ineffective paradigm of growth and development.



A number of new reports attempt to guide the UN process on the post-2015 agenda. Two of these, the report of the High Level Panel of Eminent Experts appointed by the UN Secretary General and the report of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, contain several positive elements on poverty, livelihoods, sustainability, and equity. However, they fail to deal with the structural roots of poverty, destitution, hunger, malnutrition, unsustainability and inequities, and their recommendations are insufficiently transformative for achieving sustainability, equity, and well-being.

At the launch of the HLP, report Tanya Cox, Chair of the CONCORD/Beyond 2015 Taskforce, stated: *"The UN high level panel report has all the buzzwords but the devil is in the detail. Missing is a commitment from developed countries for future development goals to apply to themselves. The solutions of the high level panel report don't sufficiently confront the challenges of today's world head on. It's very business as usual but speeded up. The report also has an over focus on economic growth without a plan B."*

Key problems include an inadequate consideration of direct democratic governance (leaving much power in the hands of central governments), the inability to recognise the contradiction between continued economic growth and the Earth's ecological boundaries, dependence on large private businesses, heavy focus on market and technological approaches to solving problems that are socio-political, complete neglect of traditional and community knowledge and practices, a strong bias towards cities and relative neglect of villages (more so in the High-Level Panel report), total absence of the mentioning of the importance of cultural diversity, spiritual and ethical approaches, unwillingness to tackle unbridled consumerism head-on, and lack of emphasis on local self-reliance for basic needs. There are moreover, no recommendations for reforming the global governance system to integrate the voices of non-state actors and organisations in a way that decreases the monopoly of nation-states in global decision-making.

Overall, these reports emphasise reforms of the existing system. Such reforms could be interim measures, but a truly sustainable and equitable future calls for more radical transformations.

## The proposed framework

In order to design the future SDGs in a way that ensures that they contribute to the development of sustainable societies, in which equity, wellbeing, justice and dignity of all is secured, based on lifestyles within the limits of the carrying capacity of the Earth, and with a respect for life in all its forms and expressions, we propose that the SDG/post-2015 framework will be structured to contain:

1. **An overarching, global consensus stating the vision of sustainable development, principles and the values that should guide policies and actions outlined in the framework:** This would be similar to Agenda 21, and reflected in its entirety in all sustainable development goals. This shared vision can be inspired by what is already reflected in officially agreed international documents, principles and targets (UNDESA, FAO, WHO, Habitat, CBD, ILO). Important elements are common-but-differentiated responsibilities, the subsidiarity principle, the precautionary principle, Principle 10, the polluter pays principle, right to food and to full access to all kinds of basic needs. The shared vision should also be constructed on evidence-based reports on planetary boundaries, systemic change and resilience, transition management, as well as on civil society concepts, such as human rights based approach, redistribution of wealth, material flows and fair sharing of the ecological footprint and respect for species rights and animal welfare.
2. **Mechanisms for monitoring progress made and ensuring accountability:** For all goals we need clear and bold targets and timetables and review mechanisms. Countries should be required to explain every three years what they have done, how they have done it, and with what results. On the other hand, a bottom-up accountability to citizens should be recognised, through for example appointing an ombudsperson for future generations, and carrying out social audits, peer reviews and monitoring reporting. Clear deadlines should be set for such



mechanisms and systems of appeal established when all other avenues of accountability have been exhausted.

3. **Democratic governance and implementation:** Some countries have already agreed to define a National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSSD). In this NSSD the SDGs can be integrated as main points of action, together with the country specific targets, and linked to the new High Level Political Forum. The World Bank's Poverty Reduction Strategy Plans (PRSPs) can be transformed into the NSSDs (especially since the PRSPs are overwhelmingly export oriented), which can shift their focus toward food and resource sovereignty. The NSSD would serve as the overall framework around which strategy plans and roadmaps are formed. Based on the subsidiarity principle, regional and local governments would define their own roles and responsibilities in harmony with the locus of power emanating from the smallest rural and urban settlements ('direct' or 'radical' democracy).
4. **Sources of finance for the SDGs should be clear from the start:** The specific budgets for achieving SDGs should be defined at national levels. Furthermore, all budgetary allocations that go against those goals have to be disallowed. In addition to being used in national budgets for realising policy strategy, the agreed 0.7 per cent GDP for ODA could be directed at the framework of the NSSDs, for achieving SDGs in partner countries. Public finances should be adequate, reliable and transparent and should not be dependent on profit-oriented private financial flows. Nevertheless there will be a need for further investments to be made. These could come from additional and alternative mechanisms, such as a global Financial Transaction Tax (FTT), CO2 tax, or a carbon, water, or ecological 'footprint' tax.
5. **Coherence checks with other (inter)national policies and institutions:** Sustainable Development needs a paradigm shift, but the majority of existing policies and institutions adhere to the dominant paradigm of unlimited growth, large scale, intensive and global production schemes, privatisation of the commons and creation of a debt-based economy. For that reason it is crucial that while implementing the SDGs there is a continuous coherence check with related internal and regional policies, like for Europe, the Europe 2020 Strategy or Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), but also with the rules of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the impacts of the international financial institutions (IFIs). Together with regular reviews of the SDGs, we need to analyse the kind of reforms that are needed to successfully overcome the obstacles posed by incoherent institutions and processes.
6. **Alternative indicators:** Debates on the "beyond GDP" indicators are growing. Existing sets of alternative indicators, such as the GNH, and the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI), can be drawn upon to develop a holistic and interlinked approach to assessing sustainable development. Rather than requiring the development of new indicators, existing ones on environment, equity, redistribution of wealth, well being, etc., could be combined into one overarching indicator 'dashboard' that portrays levels of sustainable development as accurately as possible. As the MDGs have shown, data collection can be vastly improved and broadened as a positive outcome of such a framework. Process indicators on levels of participation and accountability processes should of course, also be included.
7. **Transparency, access to information, to justice and active participation:** One of the key drawbacks of the MDGs – both in terms of the process of designing the framework and its outcomes - has lack of success in the empowerment and involvement of concerned actors. Transparency with regard to where, when and how decisions are made and active participation across the entire process is crucial for the concrete implementation of the future goals. Across all scales - from the (inter)national, regional to the local - the appropriate structures must be implemented to enable all stakeholders to be fully informed, to have access to justice, and to be able to be actively involved.
8. **A set of global goals challenging the status quo and addressing the key global challenges:** In today's globalised world, characterised by ever-closer interrelationships between economies and people, and a growing number of universal challenges requiring international cooperation, cross-border action and policy coordination, a global framework



for development is undoubtedly needed. This must inevitably be comprised of a series of global goals. To our mind, if the framework is to overcome 'business as usual', these global goals must be more than aspirational in nature and must apply to all people in all countries. Furthermore, all countries should be required to contribute to making progress on each goal in their own context, taking into consideration their different respective ecological, economic, political, and socio-cultural contexts. These goals should furthermore be expressed in the National Strategies on Sustainable Development (NSSD).

## A Set of Sustainable Development Goals

Many lists of possible goals have been presented or are soon to be published by a range of stakeholders, while consultations with civil society are on-going. A key challenge that is emerging in this context is one of maintaining the interlinkage of various issues, and avoiding the 'siloization' of goals. From an Indian context the following set of global goals have been proposed:

1. Ensuring the basis of equitable access to nature and natural resources to all peoples and communities, including the conservation and resilience of ecosystems, ecological cycles and functions, and biodiversity (an expansion of MDG7).
2. Ensuring adequate and nutritious food for all through production and distribution systems that are ecologically sustainable and equitable (currently part of MDG 1).
3. Ensuring adequate and safe water for all, through abstraction and distribution systems that are ecologically sustainable and equitable (currently part of MDG7).
4. Ensuring conditions for prevention of disease and maintenance of good health for all, in ways that are ecologically sustainable and equitable (currently partly in MDG 6).
5. Ensuring equitable access to energy sources in ways that are ecologically sustainable, as much as technically and economically viable (currently missing from the MDGs).
6. Ensuring equitable access to learning and education for all in ways that enhance ecological sensitivity and knowledge, as much as cultural, technical, technological, socio-economic, and other aspects (an expansion of MDG 2).
7. Ensuring secure, safe, sustainable, and equitable settlements for all, including adequate and appropriate shelter, sanitation, civic facilities, public transportation (currently partly in MDG7, partly absent).
8. Ensuring that in all the above, the special needs of women and children are met through rights-based and empowerment approaches (currently in MDGs 3, 4, and 5).

UNEP published its Post-2015 Discussion paper in July 2013, "Embedding the Environment in SDGs". The paper is mainly focused on a framework for the SDGs, proposing the embedding of environment into goals by making them integrated and overarching. UNEP has developed integrated targets and indicators that support a holistic approach, highlighting the interconnectedness of targets, and thus avoiding 'siloization' of particularly concrete SDG goals.

## Sustainable Development Governance and Civil Society Participation

On 26 June 2013, the UN General Assembly agreed on the establishment of a "universal intergovernmental high-level forum" (High-Level Political Forum/HLPF), replacing the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). The HLPF is intended to provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations, to enhance integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development at all levels in a cross-sectoral manner, and to have a focused and action-oriented agenda and address new and emerging challenges.



Such aims reflect the spirit of the Rio-outcome document, reflecting an agreement on the need for upgrading Sustainable Development in the hierarchy of the UN-system. Meetings under the auspices of the General Assembly are to be convened at the highest possible level, with Heads of State and Governments, every four years for a period of two days. These meetings will end with a 'concise negotiated political declaration', which could be a driving force for moving forward. The planned annual meetings under the auspices of ECOSOC, which will take eight days, with a 3-day ministerial segment, will review progress on implementation, improve coordination and promote system-wide coherence of sustainable development policies.

The Rio+20-outcome (§10) also points to the importance of effective, transparent, accountable and democratic institutions at all levels to democracy, good governance and the rule of law. For this reason it is crucial to have institutional representation at the highest-level possible, with a sufficiently resourced secretariat that can function adequately to fulfil enormous ambitions. Such a body must also have the trust and mandate of other UN institutions to do advisory work and follow-up of the SDGs. Moreover, given that one of the crucial limitations of UN institutions is that they mainly function as an association of nation-states, it is also important to envisage a broadly representative civil society capable of greater and more active participation. Beyond the international level, there is a need to establish institutions for sustainable development at national, subnational and local levels, to implement and follow up to SDGs (concretised in the NSSDs with national targets and timetables). In many cases such bodies could be based on existing institutions (e.g. village and town assemblies in many countries) that if empowered, could take on such a role.

With regard to civil society participation, the Rio+20 outcome (§84) explicitly states that the new HLPF should build "on the strengths, experiences, resources and inclusive participation modalities of CSD..."; implying that the modalities that have functioned and worked well since the establishment of the CSD should be recognised and integrated into the new body (a view also reflected in the Resolution of 26 June 2013). This means, in line with Agenda 21, the CSD should continue working with the 9 Major Groups(MGs), comprised of : NGOs, Children and Youth, Local Authorities, Indigenous Peoples, Trade Unions and Workers, Business and Industry, Science and Technology, Farmers, and Women. All MGs have two or more (North, South) so-called Organising Partners (OPs), who confer on a monthly basis, to be informed of each other's activities and discuss topics where civil society participation is involved. As indicated in "The Future We Want", it is crucial to ensure the current Nine Major Groups concept increases the integration of actors that have so far experienced limited participation, such as fishers, small farmers and pastoralists.

So while an overall consensus has been reached that the process of the post-2015 development framework has to be merged with the new SDG framework, an approach to civil society participation remains to be harmonised. Throughout the 20-year process of sustainable development at the UN, the concept of the nine MGs received a great deal of acceptance, and although there is room for improvement, it has proven a fruitful way of building overall participation. It also allowed actors to build 'ownership' of processes, and supported national, and sub-national and local implementation. The fact that all MGs have at least two or more OPs makes participation more open (to more balanced gender and regional representation) and gives better access for smaller NGOs and grass roots organisations (especially) from the South, to do advocacy work and take part in agenda-setting. In contrast, the MDG process is characteristically a top-down one, initiated by the UN and supported by UNDP and mainly Northern NGOs and other stakeholders.

The challenge will be to bridge these two approaches represented by different movements, with different backgrounds and ways of functioning. Yet another challenge is posed by the tensions emerging out of different civil society strategies and visions of the necessary



processes. The approach of development organisations are not automatically compatible with environmental organisations for instance, as the former are more concerned with structural obstacles to development. There is thus a lack of agreement over what needs to be done first. Should the main focus be on development, so poor people can start taking care of the environment? Or is it better to first tackle and avoid environmental degradation so people can manage their ecosystems (soil, clean air, water, forests, etc) to build the development upon in a sustainable way?

Where the organisational focus is on development, projects focus on concrete outcomes with regard to health care, education, (fair) trade, food production, etc. Where the focus is on environment, objectives relate to changing consumption and production patterns, preventing the destruction of natural resources by large companies/industries, stopping unsustainable consumption patterns in the Global North, redistributing wealth, and scrutinising environmental regulations, material flows, etc. Without a doubt both approaches are necessary and compatible, a fact that illustrates why both should be integrated into SDGs for the future. It will not be a smooth process by any means, as was evident during discussions at Rio+20 on the “Green Economy in the Context of Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication”. Nevertheless, it is a challenge that if faced, could go a long way towards creating greater policy coherence across the UN system.

## Conclusion

There is no dichotomy between environment and development, or increased well-being. What is crucial is that we recognise that “environment” is at the core of well-being, and therefore should not be treated as an ‘externality’. The MDG-strategy and the Green Economy are by no means adequate for achieving sustainable economies worldwide, and may even be distractions from the more fundamental challenges confronting us. Sustainable development is not merely an economic or technical challenge; it is a political one, as it also deals with closing the gap between the haves and the have-nots, tackling the vast differences in interests and power relations, and putting into place fundamentally different paradigms of well-being that prioritise sustainability and equity. For this reason, it is imperative that civil society, and in particular environmental and human rights organisations, become increasingly involved and pro-active in the SDG process, if they are to articulate and defend the interests of the most vulnerable segments of society, and of nature.



## The co-authors:



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Uchita de Zoysa is an author, strategist, speaker and frontline leader in mobilizing civil society and stakeholder alliances for shaping the global sustainability movement since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. He is the Chairman of Global Sustainability Solutions (GLOSS), Executive Director of Centre for Environment and Development (CED) and Initiator/ Global Facilitator of the Peoples Sustainability Treaties at the recently concluded Rio+20 Summit. He is the author of several books including “It has to be CLIMATE SUSTAINABILITY”, editor of 'Asian Review on Sustainable Consumption', was a member of the committee drafting the 'The NGO Alternative Treaties for Rio Earth Summit 1992', and co-author of the “Oslo Declaration on Sustainable Consumption”.



**Ashish Kothari - Founder-member of Indian environmental group Kalpavriksh,**

Ashish has taught at the Indian Institute of Public Administration. He coordinated India’s National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan process, has served on Greenpeace International and India Boards, and chaired a global IUCN network dealing with protected areas and communities. He is currently on the Board of the ICCA Consortium, and coordinates the Peoples Sustainability Treaty on Radical Ecological Democracy. Active in civil society movements relating to destructive development, conservation, and natural resource rights, Ashish is the author or editor (singly or jointly with others) of over 30 books, the latest a detailed analysis of globalisation and its alternatives.



**Hali Healy – PhD Student and environmental justice activist.**

Hali is a PhD student at King’s College London, where she is studying the social impacts of cooperative research projects on sustainability issues. She has consulted at the European Commission on initiatives related to increasing public engagement in science, and teaches a class on Science and Society at the London School of Economics. She is co-editor of Ecological Economics from the Ground Up (Routledge 2012) and several articles on activist-led sustainability science.

