Post-Rio to Post-2015 Background Paper
The post-2015 development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

One of the key outcomes of Rio+20 was to establish a process which will set up an inter-governmental Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in late September 2012, comprised of 30 members. Member States will nominate these members from the five United Nations regional groups, with the aim of achieving fair, equitable, and balanced geographic representation. These proposed SDGs will be global in nature and universal in application (therefore covering both developing and developed countries alike). They will have set a framework for the next 15 years from 2015-2030 in moving towards a more just, fair and sustainable world.

Para 248 states "Establish an inclusive and transparent intergovernmental process on sustainable development goals that is open to all stakeholders, with a view to developing global sustainable development goals to be agreed by the General Assembly." An open working group constituted no later than at the opening of the sixty-seventh session (Sept 2012) of the Assembly and shall comprise 30 representatives, nominated by Member States from the five United Nations regional groups, with the aim of achieving fair, equitable and balanced geographic representation. At the outset, this open working group will decide on its methods of work, including: developing modalities to ensure the full involvement of relevant stakeholders and expertise from civil society, the scientific community and the United Nations system in its work, in order to provide a diversity of perspectives and experience. It will submit a report, to the sixty-eighth session of the Assembly (Sept –Dec 2013), containing a proposal for sustainable development goals for consideration and appropriate action.

Related to this process, is the Post-2015 Development Agenda process. As a part of the outcome of the 2010 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Summit it was agreed that work needed to be undertaken to inform the inter-governmental debate on the post-2015 UN development agenda. To undertake this task, the Secretary-General established a UN System Task Team on the post-2015 Development Agenda. The Task Team is led jointly by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and has been requested to lead system-wide preparations for the post-2015 UN development agenda with support from all UN agencies and in consultation with relevant stakeholders. A key component of this work will be an examination of the successes and   shortcomings of the MDGs and how to build on this framework going forward after 2015.

On the other hand, the process to agree on SDGs can offer a coherent vision for sustainable development and be an effective tool for addressing wider development challenges in a comprehensive manner. They can ultimately do so by capitalising on the successes and learning from the shortcomings of the entire MDGs process and integrating efforts with the ongoing process to develop a post-2015 development framework.

Determining a new development agenda must be an urgent priority for the international community. The key challenge in moving from post-Rio to post-2015 will be the further integration of the development and environment agendas; this is a challenge that has been formally recognised for over forty years beginning with the UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972. The full and proper integration of the development agenda and the environment agenda is essentially sustainable development.

The key questions to address in this working group session will include:

1.   To the extent that the MDGs succeeded, it is because they became, for a broad range of actors, a rallying cry against poverty. Should the SDGs aim for success in the same terms? If so, how should this be done?
2.   Can the multiple challenges of sustainable development be distilled and compressed into a short set of aspirational goals?
3.   Are there dangerous path dependencies that the SDGs could reinforce or new approaches that they could foreclose? Is a second-best, sub-optimal outcome better than the status quo?

4. Can the SDGs usefully address cross-cutting, broader drivers/causes of change without getting caught up in the politics of existing processes on climate change, biodiversity, trade, etc.

5. The set of SDGs should integrate the three dimensions of SD. There should not be a reversion to an environmental focus.
   -Should this be done by attempting to reflect-to varying degrees-all dimensions in most goals?
   -Should the goals be grouped in three clusters, along the lines suggested by Sachs?

6. There is a concern in some quarters that the SDGs will distract from the poverty focus of the MDGs, with negative consequences like a decline in ODA and/or shift on donor attention to "environmental" issues.
   -Will the SDGs have the effect of diluting the successful MDG "brand"?
   -How can the anti-poverty agenda – and its various components – be embedded in the SDG frame work so as to accelerate the eradication of poverty?
   -How can the process of elaborating the SDGs be used to sharpen and focus the anti-poverty agenda? Is there an opportunity to re-conceive our understanding of development?

7. There is a widespread recognition that civil society, especially the private sector is playing an ehanced role in the SD agenda.
   -Can a HQ-centred process of discussion and negotiation successfully integrate ideas from the grass roots?
   -In elaborating the SDGs, how do we take into account the role of civil society in implementation and monitoring? What new thinking and forms of organization should be considered in the design phase?

8. What can be done to promote the emergence of champions for the SDG agenda, e.g. countries and other actors that are able to advocate for the SDGs?

9. When and how should the SDGs and the broader post-2015 development agenda?