CONFRONTING DEVELOPMENT

A Critical Assessment of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals

By Barbara Adams and Kathryn Tobin

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The MDGs are dead, long live the SDGs?

In the year 2000, the world's leaders assembled at the Millennium Summit to affirm their commitment to an ambitious development agenda, later distilled into eight "Millennium Development Goals" (MDGs). The summit famously called, among other demands, for concrete and time-bound action to eradicate extreme poverty. Criticized from the outset for being crafted without broad consultation, for an excessive focus on "measurable," quantitative goals, and for lack of accountability—especially for rich countries—the MDGs' accomplishments have been dubious and uneven. As the MDGs' expiration approaches in September 2015, their failure is unavoidable.

With this deadline approaching, the United Nations are presently considering what the world's development agenda should be post-2015. In September, two distinct UN processes—the Open Working Group and the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing—are expected to converge in the 2015 Global Summit. These processes have been the fulcrums so far of efforts to shape the future agenda. They have benefited from wide-ranging substantive contributions and expertise, and have also generated diverse approaches to participation and engagement.

These parallel processes are taking place in a broader context defined by the Millennium Development Agenda, 2012's Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, and the Financing for Development conferences. As the MDGs give way to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is necessary to ask, what is it that makes them sustainable? Who are the main actors shaping the goals, and what are their main interests? What role do business interests play, and what opportunities exist for member states, civil society, social movements, and others to shape these goals?

In this study, Barbara Adams and Kathryn Tobin give her take on the post-2015 process and suggest how various actors can intervene to shape these goals. Trained as an economist, Adams has spent decades working in (and writing about) international politics both in and out of the UN, including at the Quaker United Nations Office in New York, the UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS), and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Tobin is an independent consultant for several UN-based organizations. She has previously worked for UN-NGLS as well as for NGOs and educational institutions in New York and Uganda.

The Sustainable Development Goals will help shape the global development agenda for years to come. They will affect not only the UN's Secretariat, funds, and programmes but each member state as well as non-governmental organizations and the private sector around the world. If these processes converge to create an agenda that is universal and effective and which holds governments and others to account—that is to say if the UN lives up to its founding values—then it will reassert itself as the unique multilateral forum for addressing the many conflicts and crises that cannot be resolved by individual nations. Such an accomplishment would have implications not only for development work but across a whole spectrum of issues, and it is not too late for the United Nations—that is the organization, member states, and international civil society—to make it happen.

Stefanie Ehmsen and Albert Scharenberg
Co-Directors of New York Office, December 2014

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In 2015, the governments of the United Nations (UN) will decide upon a new global agenda that will determine the future of sustainable development. The new paradigm must eradicate poverty, reduce inequalities within and between countries, and advance human rights—economic, social, civil, political and cultural—all within planetary boundaries.

The so-called Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs, will be the banner of this agenda, and a legend by which its success will be measured. To be more than a slogan, the SDGs must be accompanied by an ambitious program of implementation and robust accountability, which will demand deep-rooted changes in all societies. A new agenda is essential to transform the current model of donor-driven aid into a universally applicable, meaningfully sustainable, accountable agenda for all.

Equally important will be the ability of the UN and its member governments to redefine their own roles to support and lead this vision and to address systemic global issues of inequalities, climate change, and unsustainable patterns of production and consumption while overcoming economic and social obstacles. The new agenda will have to "finish the job" of the development apparatus of the UN—to end poverty as we know it and in so doing restructure global divisions of the haves and the have-nots (and the have-less and the have-mores). The process of its definition and its eventual content will have to challenge all players to take on greater responsibility toward global justice and to re-shape the UN as an effective and equitable accountability mechanism for all, including public and private power centers.

As early as 2002, the global civil society coalition Social Watch declared that when it comes to eradicating extreme poverty, "No other cause or campaign has ever enjoyed such strong moral support […] *and so few actual results.*" To address the dual agenda of improving the lives of the majority of the world's inhabitants while simultaneously protecting the environment, the UN has embarked on two interlinked processes. Beginning with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), defining this global framework has continued since 2011 on two separate tracks: the MDGs' successor agenda and the simultaneous UN sustainable development process.

The UN-led "post-2015" process to continue the work of the MDGs and the intergovernmental sustainable development track begun at the 1992 "Earth Summit" started to converge in late 2012 and were officially joined in September 2013. In September 2015, the UN will hold a "Post-2015 Summit" to adopt a universally-applicable global agenda for sustainable development. For its preparation, the UN—governments and the Secretariat and development system—has embarked on an "unprecedented" process, both intergovernmental and broadly consultative. In a post-crisis economic and political context, arguably much less amenable to grandiose gestures of global development than fifteen years ago, how will the governments of the United Nations arrive at a meaningful consen-

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sus outcome? What kind of agenda will guide the actions and priorities of the development apparatus for the next fifteen years, and what will guarantee that it works better than its predecessor?

This paper examines the trajectory from the MDGs to their successors, which, in combination with the government-led sustainable development process and the outcomes of "Rio+20", are shaping the post-2015 sustainable development agenda. It discusses the dynamics and the roles played by some of the main players, identifying openings and concerns garnered by the processes to date. Analyzing the agenda's new breadth of issues, the paper outlines priorities for the upcoming processes toward the Third Conference on Financing for Development (FFD3) and the definition of the post-2015 agenda.

The process of creating the SDGs has already expanded the concept of development from something that is done to a country into a collective project in which all governments share responsibility, not only for their citizens but also for those of other states. The implementation of this agenda will have major repercussions for the UN's member states as well as its agencies, funds, and programmes. As this new trajectory takes hold, the UN's place in the global system will shift. If the UN is to remain true to its mission and restore its moral authority, it will need to forcefully assert its role as the global norm-setting body and the only legitimate value-based multilateral arena that can tackle the many problems that individual nations cannot solve on their own. As the post-2015 process enters its final months, an opportunity remains to ensure that this agenda supports the UN's framework of human rights and environmental standards. Whether the process is able to rise to this level will hinge on its universality, sustainability, accountability, and its ability to address power asymmetries in the global sphere.

A New Development Agenda

In 2000, the member states of the UN adopted the Millennium Declaration, a visionary set of objectives and values—including the collective promise to "spare no effort to free our fellow men, women, and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty." From this Declaration, the product of a decade of global conferences, the UN Secretariat distilled the eight Millennium Development Goals and presented them in the Secretary-General's "Road Map" report. Outlined by a handful of UN staff, the MDGs came to define the activities and priorities of the UN development system and became a valuable global brand for the UN. The MDGs attempted to synthesize the global development agenda defined during the summits of the 1990s into concrete,

time-bound, measurable priority objectives. With a 2015 deadline, they sought to halve the proportion of people living in poverty and the number of people suffering from hunger, to halve the number of people without access to safe drinking water, to achieve gender parity and universality of primary education, and to halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS and malaria, among other goals.

Although they called attention to the development community's urgent collective objectives, the MDGs have been roundly criticized for their reduction of the Millennium Declaration's overarching principles into simplistic and insufficiently ambitious targets for implementation, derived from only one of the Declaration's

eight chapters. Many critics point out that the architects of the MDGs followed the spirit of "only what can be counted counts," focusing on measurable goals and targets based on existing data, while leaving aside the principles of people-centered solidarity, equality, freedom, and dignity that defined the Millennium Declaration. What's more, the MDGs do not appear to have catalyzed much in the way of new and additional development financing. They may have driven funding—particularly corporate philanthropy—into sectors defined as priorities by the global agenda, but this is difficult to measure.

The MDGs focused almost entirely on actions to be taken with regard to developing countries; only one goal, MDG8, was directed at the Global North. This goal, which seeks to "promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all," is widely viewed as the agenda's "weakest link," particularly because the lack of measurable targets made it difficult to hold Northern countries accountable to their commitments. Without accountability for the Global North, the MDGs adhered to a donor-recipient paradigm. While prescribing (and later measuring) a series of policy and budgeting actions to be taken by developing countries, the MDGs viewed developed countries only in terms of their responsibilities to contribute to development. These commitments have been reflected mostly through rhetoric, rather than through policy or resources for development. A 2012 UN report charts the failure of G8 countries to take action on official development assistance (ODA), trade, investment, debt, and technology transfer. ODA eligible to be directed to MDG sectors still makes up less than 40% of the total amount.

Strengths	Weaknesses
The integrated agenda influenced policies by giving priority and operational meaning to various dimensions of human development;	Lack of consultations at its conception to build ownership led to the perception of a donor-centric agenda;
Simple, transparent, and easy-to-communicate agenda;	Excluded some important issues embodied in the Millennium Declaration, such as peace and security, and human rights;
It provided the basis for converging advocacy, thereby helping to strengthen the global partnership for development and directing global and national resources toward poverty reduction and human development;	Inadequate incorporation of other important issues such as environmental sustainability, productive employment and decent work, and inequality;
	Limited consideration of the enablers of development;
It recognized the special needs of Africa and LDCs and strengthened international commitments to address those needs.	Failure to account for differences in initial conditions.
MDG framework promoted concrete actions to address human development shortfalls, and the goals and targets were made explicit in national development policies;	MDGs influenced the setting of rather rigid national policy agendas, following international benchmarks rather than local conditions and often ignoring the complexities of the development process;
	Policies and programmes did not consider the synergies between achieving the different goals and targets;
Provided a common framework and an improved coordination opportunity for development actors;	The way in which "on-track" and "off-track" progress was measured failed to adequately account for considerable progress made by countries with low initial levels of human development (especially in Africa);
Facilitated various forms of intra-regional cooperation;	
Some countries tailored the MDG agenda to reflect their own realities, including adding relevant goals, targets, and indicators and using disaggregated data across regions and vulnerable groups.	In the global debate, the MDGs led to overemphasizing financial resource gaps to the detriment of attention for institution building and structural transformations.

Source: UN Task Team, 2012

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While the MDGs may have galvanized donor countries' promises, they upheld the dominant paradigm of economic growth for developing countries. With the assumption that development can be achieved through targeted allocation of resources, this approach ignores needed systemic or structural changes to the economic model and financial systems that themselves contribute to poverty generation and its related manifestations—precisely what the MDGs were meant to address.

As the MDGs' deadline approached—and their failure became apparent—the UN Secretariat embarked on the process of constructing the "post-2015" development agenda. Beginning in mid-2011, UN agencies, funds, and programmes convened the UN system Task Team on the Post-(MDG) 2015 agenda, and by the end of 2012, preparations led by the UN Development Group, UN Millennium Campaign, and the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Agenda were in full force. Lessons learnt from the profiling of MDGs and the changing development cooperation landscape led to a meeting of minds of aid agencies, public and private, for a more inclusive and media savvy approach to ensure buy-in and an effective communication strategy, and to put in place a new global partnership as part of the successor agenda. However, the initial focus of the UN Secretary-General-led processes was essentially that of the MDGs, premised on policies and programmes in developing countries—a finish-the-MDG-job refrain.

From MDGs to SDGs

On a parallel track, the UN member states began gearing up in 2011 for the 20-year assessment and re-invigoration of the sustainable development agenda launched by member states in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Unlike the MDGs, the 1992 process and its successors were inter-governmental and very visible at governmental level. A few member states, including some EU members and Colombia and Guatemala, attempted to shape specific Sustainable Development Goals for adoption by the Rio 2012 conference. Unable to reach agreement, the outcome document of the conference tasked the General Assembly to set up an Open Working Group (OWG) to define the SDGs.

The Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals was co-chaired by Macharia Kamau (Kenya) and Csaba Kőrösi (Hungary), who guided its process from March 2013 to July 2014 (and through a marathon 36-hour session on the OWG's final day) to eventual agreement on 17 SDGs (see box) and 169 targets. The OWG convened 70 UN member states in an innovative system of sharing the 30 allocated seats mainly in sets of "troikas." This unusual method of organizing states allowed for greater national participation and the representation of subtleties and differentiations of positions than would normally be delineated by the broader consensus positions of negotiating groups. The troika system also offered more openings for engagement by civil society organizations (CSOs) in their policy advocacy. The OWG report was adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2014 as the "main basis" for the post-2015 agenda.

The Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing (ICESDF) was created by the General Assembly to propose options on an effective financing strategy to facilitate the mobilization of resources and their effective use in achieving sustainable development objectives. Consisting of 30 regional experts nominated by the five UN regional groups, the ICESDF held five closed sessions in New York between August 2013 and August 2014, and hosted several regional outreach meetings.

Sustainable Development Goals

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all
8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts (acknowledging that the UNFCCC is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change)
14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

The ICESDF submitted its report on 8 August 2014. It presents a "menu of options" covering five broad areas: domestic public financing, domestic private financing, international public financing, international private financing, and blended finance. The report also provides analysis of the global enabling environment necessary to catalyze and incentivize long-term investment in sustainable development, including good governance, fair world trade and investment systems, continuing the reform of development banks and other international financial institutions, deepening international cooperation on tax and illicit financial flows, and strengthening global partnership for effective development cooperation. The ICESDF emphasizes the UN as the global forum that should bring specialized international institutions together and reinforce the coherence of financing frameworks, particularly the

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sustainable development financing track and the post-Monterrey financing for development process.

Convergence and Coherence, or Competition and Collision?

From July 2012 to September 2013, the two processes—post-2015 and post-Rio 2012—co-existed, however uncomfortably, initially drawn together more by timing than conceptually. The Rio conference had called for coherence with the new "post-2015 development agenda," but without guidance or instructions on how to do this. The simultaneous but separate

processes prompted concern about the disconnect of MDGs-style poverty eradication strategies from those incorporating the "three pillars" (economic, social, and environmental) of sustainable development, as well as potential competition between the UN-system-led consultations and the intergovernmental process.

The two tracks were officially combined by member states in September 2013, at the General Assembly Special Event on the Achievement of the MDGs, which resolved to "launch a process of intergovernmental negotiations at the beginning of the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly, which will lead to the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda" at
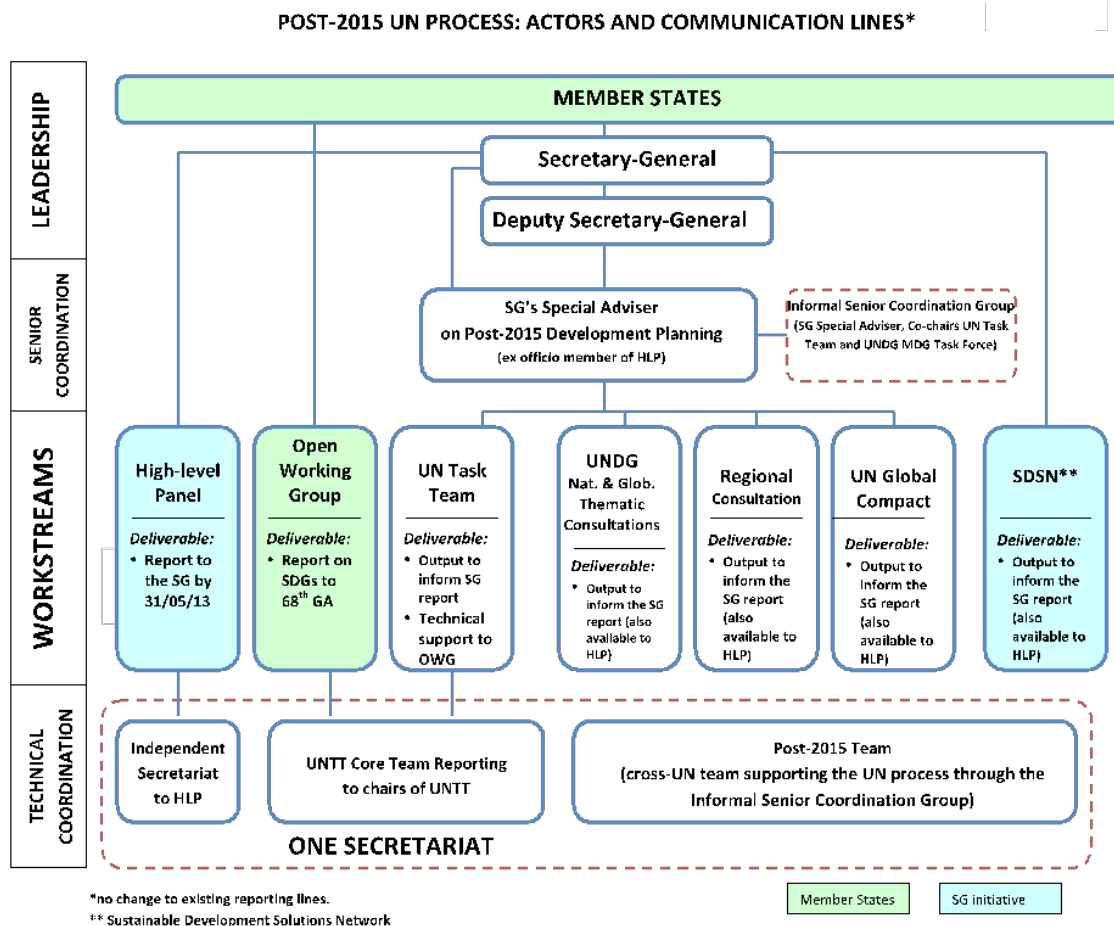

POST-2015 UN PROCESS: ACTORS AND COMMUNICATION LINES*

Chart 1 captures the status as of 2012, of post-MDGs and post-Rio 2012 processes as they edged to post-2015.
Source: One Secretariat

a summit in September 2015. The resolution also invited the Secretary-General to combine the full range of inputs into a synthesis report before the end of 2014. By the time the OWG completed its work in July 2014, the linguistic—and to some extent conceptual—shift from MDGs to SDGs was complete.

Consultations and negotiations toward the Post-2015 Summit will take place from January 2015 and run concurrently with a third thread: the Third Conference on Financing for Development (FFD3), to be held July 13-16, 2015 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. While the origins and networks of FFD3 are separate from both post-MDGs and post-Rio processes, the centrality of the financing and implementation challenges of the post-2015 agenda give it a definitive role in the search for global consensus by September 2015. In addition to the analysis that the FFD3 process will provide, it will capture the attention of and extract commitments from the

financial sector, both public and private: a noticeably missing element of both the MDG and sustainable development discourses to date.

Both the process and content of the successor agenda to the MDGs include major differences in how the respective goals were derived. Decrying the perception that the MDGs were created by "a group of white men in the basement of the UN," the UN Secretariat set out to create a widespread consultative process to garner inputs and build ownership for the post-MDG agenda. Incorporating a broadly consultative process led by the UN Development Group (UNDG) and the Secretary-General himself, these consultations occupied center stage until late 2013. Then, the intergovernmental process took over, as the OWG and ICESDF got underway, with occasional support from the President of the General Assembly, who organized thematic debates around some of the stickier issues.

Global Consultations

The UN Development Group (UNDG) began consultations in earnest in 2012 to get a head start on the process of building ownership and accountability and thereby avoid some of the MDGs' "shortcomings related to global ownership and accountability." Consultations—national, thematic, and the mostly-online "global conversation"—have taken place in more than 100 countries, and according to the UNDG have solicited the inputs of upwards of five million people.

The first round of national consultations were hosted between mid-2012 and mid-2013 in 88 countries where the UN development apparatus is active and were co-coordinated by the UNDG along with UN Country Teams. The consultations, described in detail in two 2013 re-

ports by UNDG, attempted to include "poor and marginalized people: those who would not normally have the possibility of contributing to the post-2015 debate." Many of the consultations were led at least in part by local civil society organizations with varying levels of resources and technical assistance from UNDP, and varied in terms of stakeholders consulted, methodologies employed, and success achieved.

According to Marta Benavides of *Siglo XXIII* in El Salvador and *Global Call to Action against Poverty*, who contributed to the coordination of the El Salvador national consultation, participants in El Salvador identified substantive content insufficiently included in the MDGs. Though they criticized the consultation process as being too short to allow meaningful engagement,

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participants managed to put forward recommendations regarding indigenous peoples' knowledge and principles of sustainability and harmony with nature, agricultural practices that exclude chemicals and GMOs, and the conception of poverty as multi-dimensional and rooted in colonialism and debt. An obvious question is whether the national consultations will have a significant impact on national realities and their expression by government representatives nationally and at the UN. Those involved in the El Salvador process have yet to see the issues they emphasized penetrate the SDGs discourse, and indigenous groups continue to sound the alarm about their lack of inclusion and the outcome document's insufficient attention to issues of land rights and self-determination.

Eleven thematic consultations were developed by various UN agencies in partnership with civil society organizations and hosted on the *World We Want 2015* web platform throughout 2012 and the beginning of 2013. These consultations were held on the topics of Conflict, Violence, and Disaster; Education; Energy; Environmental Sustainability; Food Security and Nutrition; Governance; Growth and Employment; Health; Addressing Inequalities (which encompassed questions of gender equality); Population Dynamics; and Water. Each thematic consultation included an open online discussion and an international showcase "leadership" event hosted by a partner government. As was the case with the national consultations, some provided more substantive content than others.

The Addressing Inequalities consultation, co-led by UN agencies UNICEF and UN Women with the support of the governments of Denmark and Ghana, probably garnered the most significant expertise. Its ten e-discussions, on topics ranging from gender equality to LGBT issues to indigenous peoples, minorities, and persons with disabilities, gathered a total of 1375 responses, many from respected civil so-

ciety networks as well as engaged individuals. Participants in the Addressing Inequalities consultation pointed out that the value of equality, though present in the Millennium Declaration, is missing from the MDGs, and that inequalities—present in all countries—should form the primary focus of a universal post-2015 agenda. The consultation report calls on governments to "address the structural drivers of inequalities"—in economic, social, political, cultural, and environmental spheres—and to tackle systemic disadvantage, through a standalone goal on inequalities as well as through relevant targets throughout all other goals.

The thematic consultation on Addressing Inequalities also served as the impetus for the Pan-African Conference on Inequalities in the Context of Structural Transformation, hosted by the government of Ghana in April 2014 in partnership with several regional civil society organizations. The CSOs involved in the Ghana conference, particularly *Third World Network Africa* and *Society for International Development*, have continued to carry the discussion forward in follow-up conferences, which can be cited by the Addressing Inequalities process as examples of significant regional follow-up.

Soliciting the Input of Millions

Of the numbers of engaged individuals heralded by the UN Secretariat, the majority comes from the UNDG-led "Global Conversation," with more than five million votes obtained via the MY World survey and several thousand users of the World We Want web platform [as of late October 2014]. These online platforms "harness the full power of technology and social media" to "capture citizens' voices and provide solid quantitative information."[1] The *MY World* global survey ("HAVE YOUR SAY: The *United Nations* wants to know what matters most to you") involves choosing six op-

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1   UNMC Director Corinne Woods in UN-NGLS May 2013

tions from 16 available global priorities. The results have consistently pointed to education and healthcare as shared global priorities by people all over the world, regardless of age or income bracket: "a timely reminder," in the words of UNMC Director Corinne Woods, "that people still care about the MDGs." The sixteen options and their results do not address structural factors of macroeconomic imbalance or entrenched poverty, perpetuating and projecting the MDGs' limited approach into their successor agenda.

Whereas the national consultations focused almost entirely on developing countries, participation in the "global conversation" was initially dominated by Global North users under 30 with high-speed Internet access. To combat this trend, UNMC engaged partners in offline, paper-vote MY World drives: the Nike Foundation and the Girl Guides in Rwanda and the governments of Nigeria (150,000 of the first 500,000 votes) and Mexico (1.6 million of the five million so far). According to UNDG's *Million Voices* report, UN Volunteers solicited paper votes from young pregnant women waiting to be tested for HIV in Haiti. Votes collected offline (through paper, SMS, or free phone calls) now amount to 77% of the more than five million MY World results. MY World mobilized a truly extensive machine of more than 700 outreach partners—Scouts and Girl Guides, corporations including Microsoft and Coca-Cola, traditional civil society actors, youth corps—to garner hundreds of thousands of off-line votes. One needs to look no further than the MY World blog to view the global excitement and anticipation of "off-the-grid" communities of, among others, factory workers in China and children with disabilities in Cameroon.[2]

The latest "engagement opportunity" on the World We Want is the "Sustainable Development Goals Score Card" launched in late Sep-

tember 2014. It asks for three simple votes: on a scale of 1 to 5, rate the proposed SDGs' ambition, action, and accountability. The average scores of these three categories are immediately displayed, with a MY World-style breakdown of gender and employment sectors. Members of civil society and governments have questioned the usefulness of such an exercise: is it meant to support the intergovernmental process or to undermine it? Is UNDG crowdsourcing evidence to reject the SDGs, or to improve them? As with the previous survey, there is no explanation or context of how the SDGs were developed. It lacks the before and after elements of engagement essential to respect both the survey takers and the process it asks them to analyze.

The process led by the UNDG for shaping the post-2015 agenda has had a much more open profile than the creation of the MDGs. Nevertheless, it has drawn heavily on processes in UNDP program countries and lacks a truly universal framework that would entail domestic policy changes in all countries. Whether the content garnered by asking people their development priorities has had any documented impact on their governments' positions during the intergovernmental negotiations, or on the outcomes themselves, is not clear. The primary result of the Global Conversation seems to be the justification of the Secretariat's consultative approach through this and subsequent consultative processes. In addition, the consultations—particularly the SDGs Score Card—pose an interesting question about what the role of UNDG (and by extension the UN Secretariat) should be in supporting—rather than competing with—a Member State-driven process to define the development agenda.

Many CSOs have expressed both appreciation for and concern about the consultation process: appreciation for the increased openings at the national level and for the opportunity to submit substantive content through the the-

2   "Deaf Children in Ebolowa, Cameroon Expect MY World Will Bring Change," July 15, 2014.

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matic conversations, but concern about the extractive nature of MY World in particular and about the misleading expectations around its potential impact on the intergovernmental process. The UNDG, in its initial proposal for how civil society could engage with the post-2015 agenda, goes as far as to suggest that initial government buy-in for the framework could be rendered unnecessary if civil society throws its weight behind a separate proposal. The two-tiered involvement of powerful, in-

sider international NGOs and a multitude of "citizens' voices" engaged by the UNDG consultation process allowed the UNDG to evade questions of meaningful inclusion and impact in the actual policy processes at the intergovernmental level. The openings that were created, while important and indeed "unprecedented," are not a substitute for the engagement of organized civil society or for a much-needed conversation about the roles and structures for non-state actors' participation at the UN.

Defining a Sustainable Development Agenda

Unlike the MDGs, the SDGs have been elaborated by an intergovernmental process led, owned, and legitimated by member states. While it is possible to find fault with the ambition and the breadth of the SDGs, they have surpassed predictions that it would be impossible for an inter-governmental process to agree on any agenda beyond a "least common denominator." At face value, the SDGs are more comprehensive and ambitious that their predecessors. The openness and engagement leading to their elaboration have built awareness and buy-in, so that implementation could begin immediately, without the 5-year lag experienced with the MDGs as described by the Secretary-General's Special Advisor on Post-2015 Development Planning, Amina J. Mohammed. Drawing on her experiences as Senior Special Assistant to the President of Nigeria on the Millennium Development Goals, Mohammed reminisced,

I struggled with the MDGs when we first got them. We asked: How do we own this? […] We could understand the excuse for the kind of 'prescribed' MDGs. It was a group of really smart people in New York, who put that all together. It took a while for everybody to understand the MDGs, for the owners at the country level to swallow them and sometimes regurgitate them. But in 2015, we don't have any excuse.

In addition to serving as a quasi-universal space for government deliberation, the Open Working Group expanded space for a range of non-state actors and their views, allowing new actors and the often crowded-out voices of social movements, South-based civil society, and autonomous organizations to participate actively and challenge the hegemony of North-based INGOs. Relying on the practices and experience of Major Group participation that existed throughout the Rio processes, the OWG in particular provided opportunities for non-state actors and civil society organizations to present substantive and grounded content. These processes and their mingling have thrown together various constituencies, CSOs, and networks, very few of which had both MDGs and sustainable development as priorities in previous processes, with interesting results.

The opening for civil society participation was created and facilitated by the OWG and its Secretariat, responding to interest and pressure from Major Groups themselves. The UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), particularly the Major Groups Programme of the Division for Sustainable Development (DSD), coordinated daily meetings between the OWG Co-Chairs and Major Groups

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and other stakeholders as well as speaking slots during the OWG sessions. DSD consistently advocated on behalf of greater space and influence for Major Groups. It included their position papers on the official UN website and circulated a compilation document of Major Groups' amendments to the working text under negotiation to OWG members.

The effectiveness of engagement throughout the process by specific groupings, particularly the *Women's Major Group* and the *Major Group for Children and Youth* (MGCY), owed much to their accountability to their constituencies and their ability to self-organize. In the face of limited funding, these two Major Groups pushed the available opportunities to the fullest potential. Through innovative digital means (listservs and Google groups), these Major Groups wrote consensus statements and orchestrated nominations processes to determine participation at OWG sessions. Managing to bring a variety of delegates to New York—particularly from regions of the Global South—to meet with governments, track processes, and present statements at often last-minute opportunities, the Women's Major Group in particular deepened ways of working collaboratively over the 16-month course of the OWG process. During the OWG negotiation sessions, co-chair Ambassador Kamau congratulated representatives of Major Groups for their persistence and for often having "outdone most of the governments" in terms of content and for mobilizing "very divergent groups […] in a very coherent fashion that I think and hope will be useful to member states."

The presence and pressure of CSOs prevented a lowering of standards as the negotiations intensified, and proved definitive in securing goals on inequalities, peaceful societies, climate change, and sustainable consumption and production, all of which would likely have been dropped without this advocacy and relationship-building with specific government

delegations. At the conclusion of the OWG process, many UN member states spoke with appreciation of the quality and content of civil society participation in the OWG, among them Bolivia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, Tanzania, Palau, India, the United States, Sweden, Uruguay, and Argentina.

The closed process of the ICESDF, on the other hand—where only the committee's experts and their advisors could attend the official sessions—meant that CSO and private sector participation was confined to half-day multistakeholder dialogues and ICESDF regional meetings. These opportunities for input, as well as the possibility of submitting written contributions organized according to the three clusters of the ICESDF agenda, were coordinated by a non-state actors' steering committee supported by the UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS). The co-chairs participated and engaged consistently in the multi-stakeholder dialogues, but participation of the Committee members was uneven and limited.

Within the ICESDF outreach settings, some of the more analytical policy work from CSOs was orchestrated by the "Post-2015 Human Rights Caucus."[3] This group served as an entry point for participation of CSOs, trade unions, and feminist organizations, including some that had not traditionally engaged in the sustainable development intergovernmental sphere. The Human Rights Caucus brought together

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3   The Caucus, led by Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR), Amnesty International, and Association for Women in Development (AWID), spearheaded a joint statement on "Human Rights for All Post-2015," which was signed by more than 350 organizations globally and presented to the OWG in December 2013. In follow up to the OWG process, the Caucus wrote a letter to the UN Secretary-General and to the President of the General Assembly, outlining the "Human Rights Litmus Test" for the SDGs to ensure that they explicitly reference human rights standards and undertake time-bound commitments to address inequality and women's rights. Their advocacy continues in the context of the post-2015 negotiations.

both local and international organizations, North and South-based, into the ICESDF and OWG spaces, building alliances around common objectives.

In partnership with *Christian Aid*, CESR released a policy brief in mid-2014, *A Post-2015 Fiscal Revolution.* The publication drew the links between sustainable development, human rights, and fiscal policy and calls for three interrelated elements: "a range of complementary domestic and global commitments" toward predicable public funding, increased equity in "distributing the burdens and benefits of sustainable development financing," and accountability through "enhanced transparency, participation and public oversight over domestic and global tax and fiscal policy making."

In a similar vein, the *Righting Finance* initiative (a group of human rights organizations coordinated by Center of Concern) emphasized the linkages between the human rights discussion in the sustainable development arena and that of the Human Rights Council, framing the means of implementation discussion on an international enabling environment for development squarely within the realm of human rights. Righting Finance also called for rights-based criteria to guide the participation of the business sector in development partnerships sponsored by the UN, supported by transparency and participation of CSOs in priority-setting and accountability.

While many of the most progressive recommendations put forward by civil society groups are not reflected in the consensus outcomes of the OWG and ICESDF, the process itself created important opportunities to move the discourse forward in the UN setting. These processes also contributed to CSO advocacy for initiatives of the UN Human Rights Council to begin processes to address the impact of "vulture funds" in sovereign debt agreements and for a binding treaty regarding the human rights obligations of transnational corporations.

Towards a Universal Agenda?

Through its three dimensions (economic, social, and environmental), the SDG agenda covers significantly more breadth than the MDGs. The OWG process took on board "new" issues of climate change, inequalities, sustainable consumption and production, and peaceful societies—topics that were excluded from the MDGs in their conception of development as a relationship between donors and recipients, and to some extent beyond the range of issues discussed at Rio+20. The fulcrum of tensions in the SDG process rested on several of these "new" issues in the increasingly comprehensive agenda under discussion: climate change (SDG 13); sustainable consumption and pro-duction (SDG 12); reducing inequality within and among countries (SDG 10); and peaceful and stable societies (SDG 16).

Though Rio+20 emphasized the necessity of addressing climate change in achieving sustainable development and poverty eradication, SDG 13 ("Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts") was a consistently contested issue in the OWG negotiations. Some member states (notably the greatest emitters of greenhouse gases) argued that the post-2015 agenda is not the appropriate forum to agree on commitments related to mitigation and adaptation to climate change, given the

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existence of the ongoing parallel process of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Many of the smaller states, including the Small Island Developing States, advocated emphatically for the inclusion of climate change in the sustainable development agenda and pushed for its inclusion in targets under each and every goal. As the 21st Conference of Parties of the UNFCCC will be held in Paris in December 2015, many of the most powerful countries prefer to keep the climate change discussion solely within the venue of the UN-FCCC. This quandary was eventually solved, if temporarily, by the inclusion of a disclaimer in goal 13: "Acknowledging that the UNFCCC is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change."

Another source of disagreement in the OWG process was goal 12, "ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns." One of the SDGs that will require domestic policy action by "developed" as well as developing countries, addressing unsustainable patterns of over-consumption and ecologically harmful production proved unpalatable to several states, some of which stated their reservations to this goal at the conclusion of the OWG. The target on fossil fuel subsidies proved particularly difficult to negotiate, resulting in late-in-the-game intense negotiations. In the first *Focus Areas Document* (March 19), the target read: "phasing out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption," and the June 2 *Zero Draft* was even stronger: "by 2030 phase out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption, with solutions that aim to secure affordable energy for the poorest." The eventually agreed upon language of the target is as follows:

> 12.c rationalize inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption by removing market distortions, in accordance with national circumstances, including by restructuring taxation and phasing out those harmful subsidies, where

they exist, to reflect their environmental impacts, taking fully into account the specific needs and conditions of developing countries and minimizing the possible adverse impacts on their development in a manner that protects the poor and the affected communities.

This obtuse language, full of qualifiers ("where they exist," "in accordance with national circumstances"), emanated from last-ditch compromises to save the target, thrashed out in a break-out group, led by the ambassador of Norway.

The final agreement on this target reflects the language of (paragraph 225 of) the Rio outcome, articulating the commitment by some countries to phase out inefficient and harmful subsidies for fossil fuels and encouraging other countries to "consider rationalising their own subsidies by removing various market distortions, including those created by taxation systems, and subsidies where they exist." The language in the OWG outcome represents a negotiation-down, a weakening of the original agreement that some attribute to the success of the fossil fuel lobby. However, the very inclusion of goals 12 and 13 offers a clear signal that any global articulation of sustainable development must include the responsibilities of "developed" countries in areas beyond the traditional development cooperation frameworks.

The discussion on inequalities represented another significant expansion to the MDGs agenda and was a point of contention in the SDGs negotiations. While representing a pervasive and persistent thematic thread in the post-2015 discussion, both among civil society and in the report of the High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Agenda, inequalities was a hard-fought-for addition to the OWG outcome. During one of the last OWG sessions, the standalone goal on inequalities was dropped, and several of its targets were incorporated into other goal areas. The co-chairs' eventual willingness to reintroduce the inequalities goal

is due in large part to the lobbying of civil society organizations, as well as the strong stance taken by the G77. As governments, led by the UK, continue to pressure for a shorter list of SDGs as part of the final post-2015 package, it will most likely fall again to CSOs to advocate to ensure that this globally relevant issue remains part of the new universal agenda for sustainable development.

Proposed goal 10, "Reduce inequality within and among countries," includes targets on inclusion, equal opportunity, and growth for the bottom 40% of the population. It also calls for the implementation of fiscal, wage, and social protection policies toward greater equality; the regulation and monitoring of global financial markets; enhanced representation of developing countries in decision-making; and facilitating migration and reducing the transaction costs of remittances. Targets to implement this goal mention special and differential treatment for developing countries, in accordance with WTO agreements, and encourage that ODA and foreign direct investment be directed to states where the need is greatest.

The inclusion of SDG 16 ("Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels") represented a unique difficulty, as it was not included in the Rio framework. Though member states articulated clear recognition of the linkages between peace and development,[4] very different positions emerged regarding how this issue should be addressed within the sustainable development agenda. The EU was joined by Scandinavian and North American countries in support of a standalone goal on peaceful societies, with the represen-

tative from Turkey asserting the "moral imperative to incorporate peace into the post-2015 agenda." Many developing countries, on the other hand, raised concern that the goal would be used to impose conditionalities on aid or to justify invasions of sovereign territory based on lack of progress toward this goal. Brazil, Nicaragua, and others warned against the increasing "securitization" of development and aid and called for sticking firmly to the three dimensions affirmed at Rio+20. These states, along with Palestine, also pointedly raised the challenge that goal 16 contains an arbitrary collection of issues—why access to justice but not military spending, embargoes, or occupation?

The eventually agreed-upon language in goal 16 includes provisions on effective, accountable, and transparent institutions and decision-making, reducing corruption, promoting the rule of law and non-discrimination, universal legal identity, and public access to information "in accordance with national legislation and international agreements." On the security side, it contains a target to "significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere" and one to "end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children"—claimed as a victory by organizations working on children's rights, but a significant narrowing of an early proposal (to "by 2030 reduce by x% crime, violence and exploitation especially of children and women including by reducing organized crime and human trafficking"). The point on crime was eventually combined with the original target on reducing illicit financial flows, resulting in a strange conglomeration of target 16.4: "by 2030 significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen recovery and return of stolen assets, and combat all forms of organized crime."

Goal 16 will likely be a site of further contestation during the final post-2015 negotiations, with some civil society organizations advo-

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4   A glance at the MDGs achievement data reveals the stalled progress of "fragile" and/or conflict-affected states in meeting development objectives; as of 2011, not one was on track to achieve even one MDG, though more recent figures show some improvement according to MDG benchmarks.

cating for a further-reaching proposal, and member states continuing to punch holes in this poorly-organized clustering and its potential hidden agendas. As the process continues to articulate the agenda that will define the development apparatus for the next 15 years at least, the tension between the three pillars of the UN (human rights, peace and security, development) and the three dimensions (economic, social, environmental) of sustainable development will persist. As raised by Ambassador Gert Rosenthal of Guatemala during the Thematic Debate of the President of the General Assembly in April 2014, how can it be that the UN's other two pillars must somehow be kept separate from its development work—especially in setting a universal and global agenda?

New Actors, New Discussions

The multiple levels and issues of the post-2015 process have created opportunities to move the discourse around sustainable development forward through opening space for concrete recommendations from civil society groups heretofore not reflected in UN discussions. These included groups active on the promotion of the global social and solidarity economy (SSE)—from Latin America, Africa, and Asia in particular—which presented analysis and recommendations in the sustainable development processes, "as part of the answer that is needed today." Emphasizing a broad range of economic activities to create decent jobs and livelihoods while simultaneously addressing

social and economic objectives,[5] the SSE movement has presented recommendations specifically directed at the post-2015 process, "based on the collaborative and mutual help practices of social solidarity economy initiatives and other organizations" emerging from a year-long consultation of more than 500 coalitions and networks at global, regional, national, and sub-national levels.

These recommendations emphasize the need for a fundamental change of development indicators; a transition to a fair, social, and solidarity economy; a human rights-based approach to development; and participation and transparency in international processes. In particular, they highlight the promotion of

> the diversification of national economies towards more localized, employment-intensive forms of production and consumption as well as international fair and solidarity trade, shifting away from resource-intensive means such as reliance on primary commodity exports (such as extractivism, mining and industrial agriculture such as monoculture).

The recommendations also call for "universal access to the Commons (water, public land, energy, air, forests, biodiversity, diversity, peace, basic and higher level education, health, etc.) that are the public assets of all citizens, and that therefore should be neither commodified nor privatized," and emphasize the need to "subject extractive industries and agribusiness to human rights and sustainable development imperatives," including by providing free, prior, and informed consent to indigenous peoples and "valorizing and promoting community-based associative initiatives that have a low environmental impact instead of the extractivism of transnational corporations."

Peter Utting, formerly of UNRISD, explains in a November 2013 op-ed, "The discussions and debates around a post-2015 development agenda have opened up a space for rethinking

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5   RIPESS explains: "There are hundreds of thousands of economic initiatives on all continents based on collective practices, which are intrinsically inclusive and rooted in the community, and that generate active citizenship by the way in which its members interact. Women's emancipation, religious and racial equality, and a respect for diversity are integral and essential parts of these processes. This approach preserves and includes indigenous and traditional cultures in their practices, creates decent work, local ownership and reinvestments within the community."

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mainstream approaches to development and governance," through which SSE can "provide important pointers for policy makers concerned with issues of equity, poverty reduction and sustainable production and consumption patterns." Furthermore, Utting concludes:

> The experience of SSE provides a wake-up call that development strategy and international development assistance need to provide an enabling environment for collective action for both economic and political empowerment. [...] This, in turn, suggests that policy makers and development agencies would do well to expand their horizons and look beyond the conventional focus on private sector development, entrepreneurship, market access, the economic empowerment of individuals and corporate social responsibility as key mechanisms for enterprise and human development.

The entry of SSE actors into the political space of intergovernmental processes on sustainable development marks a new visibility at the UN for progressive, community-based cooperation and solidarity initiatives. While the OWG and ICESDF outcome documents do not reflect SSE per se (though the ICESDF mentions cooperative banks several times), the inclusive, open process of the OWG in particular provided a new entry point in UN discussions. It sets a hopeful precedent for the kinds of discussions that may succeed in being reflected in the outcome documents of future intergovernmental processes.

Business Interests

While the sustainable development arena, particularly the OWG, provided significant opportunities for engagement by all sectors of society, the Secretariat-led post-2015 processes has been weighted towards the business sector, defined by the UN as including business entities and corporate philanthropy.

To advise him on the post-2015 agenda, the Secretary-General appointed the High-level

Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, composed of top-level political leaders, company CEOs, academics, and CSO representatives. The UN Secretariat also designated specific openings for engagement for the private sector, via *Global Compact*, and for academics and scientists (and businesses) through the *Sustainable Development Solutions Network*. Each of these three groups published high-profile reports in mid-2013, which the Secretary-General's 2013 report on the post-2015 process drew on. No track was designated specifically for civil society. The Secretariat attempted to address this gap by offering "people's voices" gleaned through the UNDG Global Conversation (see above), while UN-NGLS undertook rigorous regional consultations and presented the report to the OWG on SDGs. While accepted as an input into the intergovernmental process, the UN-NGLS report was not explicitly acknowledged by the Secretariat as on par with the inputs of well-connected academics and representatives of the business sector.

Over the past fifteen years, the UN has increasingly opened its decision-making processes to the business sector. Accompanied (and likely stimulated) by the frustrating dominant policy environment of "lowest common denominator" global agreements and insufficient reliable funding from member states—especially in the aftermath of the global financial and economic crisis, the UN has pivoted to the business sector. The Secretariat, including Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and his predecessor, Kofi Annan, have turned to the business sector, especially philanthropic initiatives such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the UN Foundation, to provide much-needed financing and support. Initially developed to generate resources to support the UN funds and programmes, these opportunities and modalities are increasingly positioned to influence agenda-setting and policy development. The 2013 report of the Secretary-General, *A*

Life of Dignity of All, frames multi-stakeholderism as the new frontier for achieving sustainable development: "The multi-stakeholder partnership model has emerged as a promising way to share burdens, catalyse action and bring all relevant actors to bear in addressing specific problems. We need to mobilize more action to deliver on commitments and exploit the full potential of the partnership approach."

With the tacit or explicit support of an increasing number of governments from across the development spectrum—in the face of unmet ODA commitments and decreasing funding for UN development activities, especially to core budgets—the UN Secretariat has explored an implementation and agenda-setting role with large corporations. This trend, termed by Brazil's Ambassador Guilherme de Aguiar Patriota as "the outsourcing of development cooperation," has proved concerning to a handful of member states and to a growing number of civil society organizations.

The conflation of "civil society" to mean all non-governmental actors and the obscuring of business interests by philanthropic foundations (what Peter Buffett called "Philanthropic Colonialism" in a 2013 op-ed) form a dangerous combination. The outsize role envisioned for the business sector, particularly within the sustainable development discussion, proves especially concerning when viewed against the relatively smaller space for civil society engagement. In expanding beyond governments to ensure its relevance in the face of new global realities, the UN has reinforced and expanded a "pay to play" dynamic, privileging both Big Business and the Northern-based, well-resourced international organizations that can be termed Big Aid.[6]

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6   This term owes a debt to Naomi Klein, who refers to large international environmental organizations as "Big Green" in her recent book *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*.

Partnership(s) for Development

In the sustainable development discussion, the term "global partnership for development"— once referring to the historical responsibility of Northern states to contribute to the "development" of Global South countries through policy commitments and financing—has been opened and distorted to feature a proliferation of "partnerships," primarily involving the business sector. The South-based civil society coalition *Campaign for People's Goals for Sustainable Development* sharply criticizes the OWG's treatment of partnership, challenging the promotion by the UN of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in the SDG on "means of implementation" (MoI). People's Goals frame the "general trend of partnerships with the private sector" as part of "an effort to revive the all-too familiar market-led strategy dominant among policy makers since the advent of the Washington Consensus in the 1980s."

By emphasizing the need to work with the business sector to find solutions to development problems, the intergovernmental processes toward sustainable development (and by extension, the UN) affirm the neoliberal paradigm and its emphasis on market-led growth, rather than challenging the structures that create and perpetuate under-development in the first place. Within the context of an increasing trend of business sector influence in UN agenda-setting, the sustainable development discussions exemplify both the "discourse repackaging" at play and the need to analyze—and if necessary, redefine—the meaning of partnership within the context of global development cooperation.

A growing number of CSOs have begun to examine the role of partnerships in shaping and implementing the Post-2015 agenda. The Righting Finance initiative, Human Rights Caucus, Global Policy Forum, Third World Network, Social Watch, the Civil Society Reflection Group

on Global Development Perspectives, and the Campaign for People's Goals for Sustainable Development are a few of the coalitions that have outlined criteria by which corporations and their interest groups should be guided in their UN participation. Three primary groups of recommendations have emerged through this new narrative of accountability: the need for ex ante criteria to determine which businesses engage with the UN; transparent safeguards against the diversion of public resources; and a focus on small and medium enterprises, social and solidarity actors, and cooperatives. Together, the implementation of these recommendations will ensure that all stakeholders involved in the post-2015 agenda and the UN in general are held to mandatory transparency and accountability safeguards, universally applied in fulfillment of the universal framework of human rights.

Financing and Implementation

The challenge of how to achieve and finance the "new" agenda has repeatedly surfaced as the litmus test for finding global agreement, as well as for its eventual success. In the OWG and ICESDF, a delicate balance was wrought as the OWG agreed on the SDGs and the ICESDF offered a "menu of options" for financing them.

The proposals of the ICESDF played down questions of systemic macroeconomic adjustments or overhauls necessary to achieve meaningful sustainable development outcomes. The ICESDF report predominantly focuses on "blended finance" and the related enabling environment. Further, the ICESDF's "find the money" approach avoided in-depth treatment of the concept of sustainable development and the needed analysis of which resources are healthy and which harmful to promote sustainability. The ICESDF report simultaneously allowed the continuation of the traditional approach of external, Northern-de-

rived financing, and implicitly turned towards corporate involvement, with minimal challenge to the policies and budgets of the major economic powers that in many cases undermine sustainability.

The near-impossible task of shaping a high-quality global agreement on financing has been bounced to FFD3, which inherits a contested political process. The "means of implementation" (MoI) were one of the most difficult issues the OWG faced, at times appearing "strong enough to topple the entire process," according to Third World Network. The Group of 77 ("G77," the negotiating bloc of 133 developing countries) and China consistently advocated that MoI must primarily come from the developed countries, and encompass issues of finance, technology, capacity building, trade, policy and institutional coherence, multi-stakeholder partnerships, data, monitoring, and accountability. SDG 17 addresses these issues, in a limited manner, with little specificity or new commitments.

While emphasizing the centrality of a political agreement on the MoI, CSOs have criticized the MoI targets adopted by the OWG, as "an approach tied too closely to the economic status quo" and therefore unlikely to enable the SDGs to achieve transformational change.

Civil society organizations with a track record of policy engagement on macroeconomic and systemic issues are bringing their analyses to the post-2015 agenda through the FFD3 process. These organizations point to the need for FFD3 to address substantive global issues of domestic resource mobilization and international tax cooperation, trade and investment regimes, the dynamics of redefining ODA, systemic issues including financial and monetary reform, criteria for public-private and multi-stakeholder partnerships, and a sovereign debt workout mechanism. Going to the crux of

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a universal and sustainable agenda that also addresses inequalities within and between countries, many CSOs are calling for attention to the sustainable development budgets especially of rich countries to be included in global deliberations.

How do the SDGs measure up?

The post-2015 agenda must stand apart from its predecessors in dramatic ways. It must apply to all policies of all states and explicitly (re-)define development as consisting of economic, social, and environmental considerations and as a process dependent on the policies, commitments, and actions of all countries. It must abandon the conflation of economic growth with societal progress, and the relegation of environmental, gender, and human rights considerations to side issues or after-thoughts.

Taking into account inequalities both within and between countries and the eradication of poverty within ecological limits signifies a fundamental redefinition of well-being, recalling the original purpose of the UN as a universal agenda-setting forum. To live up to its transformative billing, the post-2015 agenda, with new commitments for implementation and financing, must satisfy the demands of universality, sustainability, and accountability.

Universality

The sustainability of the SDGs—as well as their viability as a global agenda—fundamentally rests on their universality. The extent to which the UN-led SDGs apply to all countries forms the primary criterion for their legitimacy in a global multilateral structure elsewhere devoid of democratic representation. With the expanding consciousness of planetary boundaries and the need to reduce inequalities, the SDGs explicitly recognize the need for a global sustainable development agenda to constitute

and require change in developed industrialized countries as well as in "developing" ones. Development cooperation alone will prove insufficient to garner the kind of change necessary to keep climate change at levels lower than catastrophic and to achieve global eradication of poverty "in all forms, everywhere" as outlined in SDG 1.

As mentioned above, MDG 8 failed precisely because it did not catalyze domestic policy change in rich countries. The MDGs' lack of impetus for rich country action on "enabling environment" or MoI issues provides important context for the SDGs' expanded focus, according to a 2012 Oxfam policy paper:

> While entirely justifiable in terms of responsibility and the rapidly blurring distinctions between "North" and "South," the post-2015 process will need to deliver conclusions and commitments that are far more effective than their predecessors in influencing the actions of powerful governments.

The SDGs must pertain to developed countries' domestic policy choices related to their own rates of poverty and greenhouse gas emissions, and undertake national policy conversations on, for example, the implications of their austerity policies at home as well as their foreign policy priorities.

While an improvement on the MDGs, the balance of responsibility is still tilted far away from the power centers. Operationalizing the Rio principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" through a universal agenda, the OWG negotiations rested on the phrase "with

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developed countries taking the lead," being added at the end of several targets. Of course, this addendum (and its framework in general) is vague. As a recent World Resources Institute blog asks, "Will rhetoric around universality turn into tangible and substantial commitments by all countries? [...] How much of this will materialize in the final agenda and its subsequent implementation?" How universality is conceptualized as the post-2015 agenda is agreed upon will influence the buy-in, especially from developing country governments; the relevance to audiences world-wide; and the legitimacy of the framework as a whole.

Sustainability

Moving from "development" à la MDGs to "sustainable development," the OWG struggled to integrate all three dimensions (economic, social, and environmental) of sustainable development in the SDGs. Seven of the OWG's goals explicitly address social issues, five environmental, three economic, one all three dimensions,[7] and two "other": means of implementation, and peaceful societies/rule of law. While the number of goals is only one indicator, the distribution does confirm the shift from the narrow construct of the MDGs, but not to an integrated framework. The OWG co-chairs referred frequently to the need to take into account the connections between these three groups of sustainable development concerns in the formulation of the new agenda. This nuance disintegrated as negotiations proceeded, resulting in more clear-cut targets criticized, for example by civil society coalition *Beyond2015*, for "miss[ing] the interlinkages between the three dimensions of sustainable development, [and] undermining a coherent and holistic approach."

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7   SDG 7, "Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all," addresses social (modern energy for all), environmental (sustainable), and economic (affordable) concerns.

The proposed goals have also been heavily criticized as weak on environmental content. The Campaign for People's Goals on Sustainable Development and Kate Raworth, recently of Oxfam, espouse the view that the SDGs do not go far enough to ensure environmental sustainability. Raworth has presented a detailed analysis of whether the SDGs will ensure that the world stays within the "doughnut" of planetary boundaries. While some of the environmental targets clearly aim for a deadline of 2020, the goals are insufficiently detailed and contain no deadlines on halting biodiversity loss and combating climate change. Criticism also abounds about the weakness of the language around sustainable economic growth, pointing to the (last-minute) addition of "endeavor" ahead of target 8.4 on decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation. Raworth writes:

> If the aim is to combine 'sustained economic growth' with combating climate change, halting deforestation and biodiversity loss, and significantly reducing air, soil and water pollution, then decoupling GDP from resource use is, by definition, absolutely essential—a logical necessity.

The Campaign for People's Goals for Sustainable Development points out several areas in which the proposed SDGs and targets, even if achieved, fall short of ensuring real sustainability: the need to keep global atmospheric temperature increase below 2 degrees Celsius (mentioned in the chapeau but not in goal 13 on climate change); the need to phase out the burning of fossil fuels (of which only subsidies are mentioned); the effective regulation and governance of synthetic biology, especially the development of biofuels and transgenics; or addressing the environmental (and social) impacts of large-scale development projects including extractive industries and hydropower projects. The People's Goals response also challenges the promotion of voluntary initiatives of corporate sustainability reporting, criticizing the OWG target to "encourage"—rather than require—companies to report on their

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social and environmental impacts. The SDGs, in their view, "do not face up to what it will take to stay within the environmental ceiling—especially with unlimited GDP growth as the driving economic paradigm."

Accountability

The accountability of all governments, across the full development spectrum, will be an intrinsic piece of the post-2015 puzzle. With the increased role of the corporate sector in implementation and in the decision-shaping process, all stakeholders must have meaningful accountability to both the agenda and the UN principles on which it rests. Accountability of governments toward their citizens, of governments toward the citizens of other governments, of the supra-governmental structures to the governments and peoples they subject to conditionality or austerity, and of businesses operating multi-nationally is essential to ensuring an effective and meaningful post-2015 UN agenda.

The accountability mechanisms that are set up to govern the post-2015 commitments, most likely under the High-Level Political Forum, must be grounded in the existing intergovernmental commitments of human rights and environmental treaties. *No Future Without Justice*, the report of the Civil Society Reflection Group on Global Development Perspectives, suggests a Universal Periodic Review on Sustainability to consider information provided by civil society and the business sector, as well as governments. As emphasized by many civil society organizations throughout the process, accountability to post-2015 objectives cannot rest on voluntary initiatives. "Any monitoring and accountability framework," the Post-2015 Human Rights Caucus asserts, "should introduce mandatory, independent assessments and periodic public reporting of the cross-border human rights and sustainable development impacts

of governments, businesses and international financial institutions."

Pointing to the weaknesses in MDG accountability, where commitments have been "more rhetorical than real," a joint report published by CESR and the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in 2013 asserts that "If accountability and human rights are central to the next generation of development goals, it is more likely that the current set of weak political commitments can be transformed after 2015 into a more robust global social contract." Where the Secretary-General's 2014 sustainable development report recommends "An enhanced accountability framework for voluntary commitments and partnerships for sustainable development" as part of the post-2015 agenda, the UNDPI NGO Conference Outcome states firmly that "a system of voluntary reporting on development commitments will not be enough to deliver a just and sustainable world for current and future generations."

Addressing Power Asymmetries

Universality and accountability are two essential characteristics of the post-2015 agenda that are intrinsically connected. "Accountability is only meaningful if it includes the powerful," writes Roberto Bissio in the 2014 Social Watch report. The universal application of the agenda and its extension to "other stakeholders" including corporations must be accompanied by effective monitoring of the commitments and actions of "rich countries, the intergovernmental institutions (particularly those dealing with trade, investment and finances), transnational corporations and even some huge foundations and NGOs with budgets of billions of dollars." If post-2015 accountability does not extend to these actors, "there will be no credible development agenda and the multilateral system will lose its legitimacy." Beyond2015

asserts that "the universal nature of the SDGs creates an urgent need to assess each country's contribution to global realization of these goals," including *vis-à-vis* their extraterritorial impacts. The High-Level Political Forum, Social Watch continues, should review and monitor "multilateral agencies, the Bretton Woods Institutions and any corporation or 'partnership' wanting to use the UN name, logo or flag."

The assumption of a level playing field that does not exist has characterized the new multistakeholderism embraced in the fashioning of the universal agenda, ignoring the power dynamics and variances in resources, access, and policy influence by the actors involved. While expanding partnerships—especially in the context of a universal development agenda that acknowledges new roles for powerful actors—may be welcomed by proponents of increased civil society engagement in global governance, in reality the additional space ceded is eaten up by the most powerful players. By promoting "partnerships" and "consensus" without acknowledging power imbalances, these governance models are likely to reinforce the status quo and increase the imbalance.

Conclusions

Still far from complete, the post-2015 agenda is already having an impact, at least on the conceptual level. Development has been redefined as a collective project. Governments share responsibility both for their own citizens and for those of other states. In the months remaining to formulate the sustainable development agenda, the UN—both member states and the Secretariat—have an opportunity to ensure that the SDGs' conceptual shift is joined by a programmatic one. Member states can broaden their formal participation by drawing on governmental perspectives beyond their foreign ministries while the Secretariat can recommit to the UN's founding values by challenging, rather than reflecting, the inequalities and injustices of the world order. This redirection would have major implications not only for the prospects of the development agenda but for global politics generally. It would be an affirmation of multilateralism as essential to successfully facing intractable geopolitical challenges and emerging crises. For the UN to remain relevant, it must embrace its unique role and advance a meaningful and effective development program marked by universality, sustainability, and accountability.

Member States

The post-2015 process has illuminated both the limitations of governments' representation at the global level and the extraordinary potential of multilateral negotiations to yield agreement that transforms power structures between groups of countries. In particular, the process has spotlighted the need for coherence at the national level, not ministry rivalries, and between on-the-ground realities and their representation at the global level. Governments bring a narrow approach to their policy deliberations at the UN, determined mainly by positioning *vis-à-vis* other governments, rather than representing the breadth of commitments, interests, and dialogue of their countries. Most governments approach global agreements from a defensive posture, trying to minimize their commitments and maximize their short-term gains.

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The engagement of CSOs offsets to some extent the limitations in how countries are represented at the global level, bringing expertise and on-the-ground experiences. These contribute to grounding the policy deliberations in peoples' realities and demand attention to overcoming structural obstacles, most not being content with "quick-wins." However, CSOs have neither the mandate nor the means to close the accountability gap. This rests with democratically accountable national and sub-national legislatures, which should strengthen their interest in and oversight of their executive branch in regional and global policy fora.

Each country is responsible for how it is represented in multilateral deliberations and should draw more consistently from parliaments, sub-national governments, and civil society as well as the executive branch of government. While the current trend in the UN toward the multi-stakeholder approach broadens participation by bringing in non-member state expertise and experiences, it is not country-led and threatens to bypass or undermine the very principles of democratic country-led governance on which the UN is founded.

"The Secretariat We Want"

The UN Secretariat and development system have been extraordinarily active in their efforts to shape the post-MDG agenda, primarily by reaching out to the business sector, and also to many CSOs. The UN has also initiated an internal process to equip itself to be "fit for purpose" in implementing the post-2015 agenda. As part of this project, the UN leadership has the occasion and responsibility to shift from investing heavily in the technical approach and programme country orientation to center its work on the UN's value-based framework. Rather than concerns about their institutional future, the UN development apparatus must shift to take on the universal remit of the new

development agenda, grounded in the international treaties and global norms and standards on which the legitimacy of the UN rests. In some of its post-2015 activities, the Secretariat has risked undercutting the intergovernmental structure instead of facilitating it, as it seeks to "hack the process" of citizens' engagement with their governments by presenting citizen's views without context, rather than addressing the democracy defaults through the UN's existing normative framework of human rights and environmental treaties. This moment provides a timely opportunity to evaluate the unintended consequences of the Secretariat's approach to the post-2015 process and how these lessons learned can inform its role moving forward. How can the interests of the Secretariat be reframed to encompass—and support—a successful intergovernmental process?

The UN Secretariat must seek to envelop all players in its value-based accountability frameworks, rather than a falsely egalitarian openness to multiple (types of) "stakeholders" and partnerships. The UN and its leadership have embraced the business sector as an essential partner, in an attempt to bolster the relevance of and support for the UN. This strategy has been pursued at a high price, as the UN has lost much credibility with the less powerful sections of society and is no longer seen as the undisputed champion of human rights or the center of struggles for justice. With a new agenda focusing on the rights and responsibilities of all actors in society, including transnational corporations, the Secretariat has the opportunity to revisit its understanding of "relevance" and reclaim its original values and purpose—to challenge the current unequal world order rather than reflecting or relying on it.

Post-Post-2015

This reframing of the Secretariat and of a newly successful intergovernmental structure

holds significant implications for the multilateral arena as a whole. As Lou Pingeot (2014) writes, "The Post-2015 development agenda is expected to be a major shaper of future development activities globally, with important implications not only for the Global South (which has traditionally been at the center of 'development' policies) but also for the Global North," and cites the Secretary-General as framing the definition of the new agenda as "a daunting yet inspiring and historic task for the United Nations and its Member States" and as a test of multilateralism.

If the post-2015 agenda confirms, rather than undermines, the UN's unique "value add"— its normative framework of human rights and environmental standards—it will offer a much-needed bolster to multilateralism, essential for building global cooperation to address a full range of policy failures and in the context of geopolitical changes.

The remainder of the post-2015 process provides an opportunity to reset the course, to speak to existing power configurations and to reconfigure them. By connecting governments to dynamic forms of self-organizing, and by reaffirming the value-based framework unique to the UN, post-2015 can ground a universal agenda in a universal arena, founded on sustainability and accountability, accompanied by meaningful strategies and commitments for implementation.

Acronyms

AWID	Association for Women in Development
CESR	Center for Economic and Social Rights
CSO	Civil society organization
DESA	Department for Economic and Social Affairs
DSD	Division for Sustainable Development
FFD3	Third Conference on Financing for Development
G77	Group of 77
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICESDF	Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MGCY	Major Group for Children and Youth
MoI	Means of Implementation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OWG	Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals
RIPESS	Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SSE	Social and Solidarity Economy
UN	United Nations
UNDG	UN Development Group
UNDPI	UN Department of Public Information
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
UN-NGLS	UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service
UNRISD	UN Research Institute for Social Development
WTO	World Trade Organization

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