



No. 3 – November 2013

Moving Forward: Challenges for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at International and National Levels

2015 will mark the end of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) process that started in 2000 (See GEPP Briefing No. 1, *Millennium Development Goals: Measuring progress towards social justice*, June 2012, <http://www.unige.ch/gepp/GEPPBriefings/GEPP-Briefing-No1.pdf>). Following the Rio+20 Conference, a new Global Sustainable Development Agenda is emerging, with the ambitious objective to improve the development objectives designed 13 years ago, while also taking into account the existence of planetary boundaries.

In this context, the GEPP Policy Dialogue organised on 11th September 2013 aimed to evaluate the progress made in the definition of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to discuss the difficulties and opportunities to set up a common, universal, agenda in order to address and monitor global challenges. The debate was articulated around the following questions:

- How can goals that really enable progress toward sustainability be formulated?
- How can common goals that address the concerns of both developed and developing countries in a single global agenda be defined?
- What are the risks and advantages of a unified framework?
- How can a universal agenda be easily understood by stakeholders in civil society while being pertinent, applicable and measurable?
- What lessons can be learnt from the achievements and limitations of the MDGs?

Ambassador Michael Gerber (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, SDC), presented the position of Switzerland regarding the Post-2015 Agenda, before **Mr. Vicente Paolo Yu** (Global Governance for Development, South Centre) and **Ms. Sylvie Motard** (United Nations Environment Programme, Regional Office for Europe) commented with the view of their respective organisations.

Towards an ambitious, paradigm-changing Agenda on Global Sustainable Development

Launched in 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will not be reached by 2015 but are a basis from which lessons can be drawn, especially in terms of attractiveness and mobilization. Beyond the results and shortcomings of the MDGs, the Post-2015 Agenda should also be built on Rio achievements, i.e. it should include the framework of the Agenda 21 endorsed in 1992 and also the new topics that emerged at Rio+20 (Green Economy, Resilience, etc.).

As news challenges require new responses, the Post-2015 Agenda represents a paradigm shift. It must include the idea of planetary boundaries, but also the concept of transformative change: root causes of poverty must be addressed. To be effective, it must be universal, which requires new roles & instruments:

- New Global Partnerships: Private sector, emerging economies, middle-income countries, civil society, science etc.
- Multilateral and South-South cooperation
- Multi-bi, global/regional programmes, silent partnerships etc.

Dealing with the complexity of the process

Defining an overarching Post-2015 Agenda is however a difficult and complex task. At the moment many UN bodies are working on it, including the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons, the Open Working Group on SDGs and the Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing. National processes are no less complex, as they require a “whole-of-government approach”, and they must also ensure that the whole process is participatory and representative. Universality is a strong commitment, but how buy-in from all sides can be ensured?



Regarding Switzerland, the country is active at the international level in the Open Working Group on SDGs and the Global consultations UNDG; it is also networking for building alliances and advocating for a better coordination of the process. At the national level, the Swiss administration is developing its position through an inter-departmental Task Force, a SDC Core Team, Thematic Working Groups and consultations within the federal administration and with the public (private sector, academia and civil society). A web platform has also been launched: www.post2015.ch.

Beyond the orientation of the agenda, there is also a new framework to be defined, with means of implementation and a financing strategy. In this regard, it is important to go beyond ODA, with new financing sources: FDI, DRM, remittances, export credits, guarantees etc. and also to look at innovative instruments such as airline tickets taxes, financial transactions or CO₂ taxes. The Agenda must also be action- and result-oriented, measurable, communicable, time-bound etc. There is finally a need for a better accountability, with monitoring tools such as a periodic review mechanism.

Key elements of the Sustainable Development Goals

For Switzerland, the overarching goal should be the combination of Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication, with the inclusion of the following principles:

- Human Rights
- Respecting Planetary Boundaries
- Social Inclusion and Justice
- Universality
- Policy Coherence.

The Swiss position is also that there must be stand-alone goals on:

- Water
- Health
- Gender Equality
- Peace & Security

As well as cross-cutting or (sub-) goals on:

- Disaster Risk Reduction
- Migration and Development
- Sustainable Consumption and Production

Also, in formulating each goal, the three dimensions of sustainable development should be integrated. Thus, though an issue may be primarily economic (eg. agricultural development), the social aspects (eg. access to land and credit for small farmers) and environmental aspects (ecologically sound techniques) should also be considered.

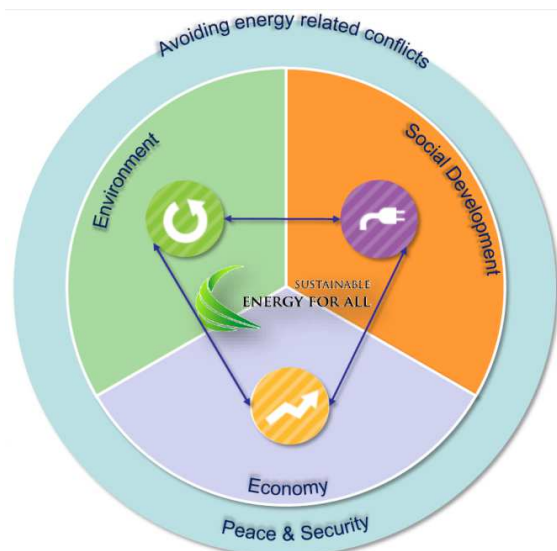


Fig. 1. A potential Sustainable Development Goal from the Sustainable Energy for All Initiative? (Source: Michael Gerber presentation on the Post-2015 Agenda).

Key challenges and the way forward

The main challenge faced by the post-2015 Agenda, according to the South Centre, is that it must be truly universal. In this regard, developed countries must also accept goals and targets. These targets must not have negative effects on developing countries and guarantee developing countries' environmental and development space. A key broad goal that is important for developed countries is sustainable patterns of consumption and production. In this sense, if there are new obligations on part of developing countries, they should be matched by obligations on the part of developed countries.

Lastly, the SDGs will be a test case for multilateralism. In this respect the role of industry and the financial sector will be crucial. We are however still at the beginning of the process: The outcomes might be not as detailed or elaborated as Agenda 21 but all the basic elements and the same comprehensive approach are needed.