

A Brief Overview of Discussions

10th Session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals

31 March - 4 April 2014, New York

The tenth session of the OWG took place in New York from 31 March to 4 April 2014. It started with a presentation regarding the definitions of goals, targets and indicators and followed by the discussion of the focus areas joined in clusters. Those were:

- 1. Poverty eradication; promote equality.**
- 2. Gender equality and women's empowerment; Education; Employment and decent work for all; Health and population dynamics.**
- 3. Water and sanitation; Sustainable agriculture, food security and nutrition.**
- 4. Economic growth; Industrialization; Infrastructure; Energy.**
- 5. Sustainable cities and human settlements; Promote Sustainable Consumption and Production; Climate.**
- 6. Conservation and sustainable use of marine resources, oceans and seas; Ecosystems and biodiversity.**
- 7. Means of Implementation/Global partnership for sustainable development.**
- 8. Peaceful and non-violent societies, rule of law and capable institutions.**

It also included a dialogue session with major groups and other stakeholders.

Countries highlighted elements that they deemed were not adequately addressed in the revised focus area document. These elements included: the Rio principles including the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR); needs of countries in special situations including countries in Africa, small island developing states (SIDS), least developed countries (LDCs), and landlocked developing countries (LLDCs); balanced targets for both developing and developed countries; human rights and a human rights-based approach; transportation; and culture.

Throughout the week many representatives highlighted the need for the document with the focus areas and all future work to have consistent terminology, based on existing internationally agreed definitions. Even though on several occasions the debates reflected the traditional North-South dichotomy, on issues such as gender and women's empowerment, cultural, social and human rights aspects were strongly highlighted. There were also suggestions to make some issues such as gender equality and women's empowerment, poverty eradication and economic growth cross-cutting.

In summary, the reactions to have a stand-alone goal on the proposed focal areas were as follows:

- On "poverty eradication", many countries underscored that poverty eradication should be incorporated as an overarching priority for the SDGs; countries underlined the interconnection of poverty eradication with other areas, such as education, food security, health, energy, climate change;
- Regarding the gender equality and women's empowerment focus area, there was strong support for a stand-alone SDG on gender equality and women's empowerment; suggestions to mainstream gender equality and women's empowerment into all SDGs were also made; it was proposed that universal health coverage be not a target, but a goal, in itself;

- While many delegates recognized the interlinkages between the issues of water and agriculture and food security, there was broad support for stand-alone goals on these focal areas;
- Speakers who called for a goal on economic growth did recognize that infrastructure and industrialization should be either targets or indicators in the achievement of the goal; energy was seen by most as a possible goal, but very much linked to sustainable consumption and production patterns;
- On “sustainable cities and human settlements”, there was a broad recognition of the need to have a specific SDG on this issue, although some countries felt that separating urbanization and rural development may undermine the efforts to achieve sustainability for all; Regarding sustainable consumption and production patterns - SCP, many consider this an area for a dedicated sustainable development goal; others view SCP as a cross-cutting issue, however. In addition, there were some speakers who believe that SCP should be merged with other focal areas such as Infrastructure, Energy, and Ecosystems and Biodiversity;
- On “climate”, apart from one call for a specific SDG on “climate change”, the speakers referred to the cross-cutting nature of “climate change” and stressed specific targets on this matter should be integrated under several SDGs;
- On “Conservation and sustainable use of marine resources, oceans and seas”, there was a broad consensus for a stand-alone goal on the subject, building on the work of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS);
- Regarding “Ecosystems and biodiversity”, under which forests appear, the first targets were proposed during the major groups and other stakeholders presentations by the Forest Stewardship Council on behalf of NGOs, indigenous peoples and women:
 1. Ensuring rights for those most directly affected by deteriorating ecosystem systems;
 2. Recognition of indigenous rights in conserved territories and areas;
 3. Recognition of three Aichi targets for 2020 (5) – halving the rate of loss of all natural habitats including forests, and reducing degradation and fragmentation; (7) – sustainable management of areas under agriculture, aquaculture and forestry; (15) – enhancing ecosystem resilience and the contribution of biodiversity to carbon stocks through conservation and restoration and contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation and to combating desertification;
 4. Focus on demand management;
 5. Focus on sustainable production and consumption, where demand for forest products and biomass exceed levels of supply and priority is given to functional uses with local livelihoods protected.

In an earlier session, a suggestion was made to merge Infrastructure, Energy, and Ecosystems and Biodiversity under the title “Natural resources and Ecosystems”, with specific provisions on promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns. Targets under this new merged area would include reversing the deforestation trend, as well as valuation of biodiversity and other ecosystems’ contributions.

Several countries stressed the need to take a balanced approach to reflect social and economic aspects in Focus Area 17 as it is currently oriented towards environmental conservation.

Regarding forests, some Member States indicated that the current focus areas document does not contain sufficient reference to forests despite their significant benefits and contributions to achieve sustainable development. Some speakers proposed ideas to reformulate the title of the focus area, including: addition of forests to the title; clarification to specify terrestrial or land ecosystems; and expansion to include environment, ecosystems and biodiversity. Some proposed a stand-alone goal on forests. A number of

countries supported forest-related targets, including promoting sustainable forest management and addressing deforestation. Others proposed a goal or targets related to ecosystems and/or natural resources.

Regarding biodiversity, some countries called for a stand-alone goal on biodiversity. Several speakers proposed to include some elements of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets as targets. Many highlighted linkages between the subject and other focus areas, including: poverty eradication; sustainable agriculture; food security and nutrition; water and sanitation; energy; gender equality and women's empowerment; education; sustainable consumption and production; climate; and oceans and seas, among others.

Options for targets, *inter alia*, included: promoting sustainable forest management; addressing deforestation; restoring degraded forests; protecting mountain ecosystems; restoring degraded wetlands; addressing land degradation; halting loss of biodiversity; protecting threatened species; stopping poaching and trafficking of endangered species; maintaining the genetic diversity; ensuring fair and equitable benefit sharing of genetic resources; participation of indigenous peoples and local communities in decision making and in benefit sharing of forests and other assets; and promoting and protecting traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples. Other proposals included addition of the Bonn Challenge as a target to restore 150 million hectares of lost forests and degraded lands worldwide by 2020 and streamlining forest-related targets into one target. Some countries cautioned against the inclusion of a target on a land-degradation-neutral world due to lack of agreement under the UNCCD process. Other forest-related issues highlighted included: the role of forests for employment; integration of natural resources into national and local development planning processes; management of natural resources at the landscape level; the role of trade as a development catalyst; education and awareness raising of values of sustainable management practices; strengthening the forest governance framework; and linkage with disaster risk reduction.

- On “means of implementation”, the debate primarily focused on maintaining MOI as a stand-alone goal versus creating a section for MOI under each target (with specific, time-bound and numerical elements), as implementation for various targets will vary greatly; the idea of MOI as a stand-alone goal as well as under each target was also put forth; there was a suggestion to divide the stand-alone goal of MOI into two categories: (1) thematic and (2) procedural;
- Finally, a number of Member States advocated for a stand-alone goal on “Peaceful and Non-Violent Societies, Rule of Law and Capable Institutions”; others argued that it should be entirely integrated in other goals, as the themes are “enablers” of development rather than sources of development in themselves, and are largely within the scope of national sovereignty. Other Member States yet recommended that the cluster be split into two separate goals, namely, one on “peaceful societies” and one on the “rule of law”. Several Member States pointed out the link between these themes and environment-related topics such as resilience of societies to natural catastrophes, the ability to manage natural resources sustainably, and the relationship between peace and clear land tenure and access to natural resources.