

**Conceptualizing a Set of Sustainable Development Goals**  
**A Special Event of the Second Committee of the UN General Assembly**  
**organized by UNDESA/DSD**  
**Tuesday 16 October 2012**  
**10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.**

Share 5 fairly simple propositions about the next set of global goals during my initial remarks:

**First proposition: Goals should be forward-looking. Designed to tackle tomorrow's problems not yesterday's.**

- Perhaps obvious, but it's important to note what the world looks quite different today than it did in the 1990s when the MDGs were initially conceived. The world will look even more different in 2030. So what are some of the trends that the next set of global goals will need to grapple with?
  - **Location of poverty is shifting** – Recent data suggests that about 1.3 billion people living under \$1.25/day with more than half in India and China. But if strong growth and good policy continue, we anticipate considerable reduction in poverty in these countries. The majority of the poor in the next 10-15 years will be concentrated in Africa and fragile states. Some have argued that within the next 5-10 years, Nigeria will have more poor people than either China or India.
  - **Inequality is on the rise** -- A recent (2011) OECD study found that 16 out of 22 countries in the OECD are experiencing an increase in inequality. Same is true for China and India. Cover article in the Economist this week focuses on the fundamental challenge of inequality. Article argues that "if emerging Asia's income distribution had not worsened over the past 20 years, region's rapid growth would have lifted an extra 240 million people out of extreme poverty". Tackling inequality is essential if growth is going to lead to poverty reduction in any sustained manner.
  - **Environmental thresholds are being violated.** –Statistics here are well known. 1.2 billion people live in water scarce regions today, a number that could increase to 1.8 billion people by 2025. Concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere already exceeds 390ppm when many scientists argue that the threshold to avoid catastrophic climate change is 350 ppm. If we are already exceeding the limits on what the planet can sustain today, how will the planet be able to cope with a global economy that is 4x larger in 2050?
- ➔ What do these trends mean for next set of development goals?
- Africa and fragile states are central to the poverty challenge.
  - Equity and sustainability must be embedded in the next generation of goals.

**Second proposition: Goals will need to be multi-dimensional if equity and sustainability are to be addressed.**

- Broad agreement that integrating sustainable development into the post-2015 agenda is a good thing. Big question is how.
- Start by looking at the MDGs. Did the MDGs promote sustainable development? Not really. Why:

- Lack of balance – Three pillars of SD: social, economic and environmental. MDGs prioritized social but gave less attention to economic and very little to environment.
- Lack of linkages – recognize that these three dimensions are tightly interlinked. Example: health goals depend in part on clean air and water. Yet MDGs did not recognize these links.
- Lack of coverage – recognize that some challenges to sustainable development are global in nature – climate change, consumption and production. Yet MDGs asked little of HICs.
- How to integrate sustainability into post-2015 development framework? Two things are going to need to change:
  - Bake all three dimensions of SD into each relevant goal (DNA analogy, string analogy).
  - In addition, we will need explicit global goals on sustainability to tackle collective action problems where appropriate (clean energy, forests, resource consumption)

**Third proposition: Goals should be few in number, focused and simple. Prioritization is key.**

- Again obvious but all the discussion and debate today points in the other direction.
- The spectrum of what is being discussed in terms of global goals is incredibly wide-ranging.
  - On one end, and the basis of this session, you have candidate SDGs. The proposal that Colombia and Guatemala put forward in the run-up to Rio centers on sustainability and includes goals such as biodiversity, oceans, water, sustainable cities, changing consumption patterns.
  - On the other end, you have proposals tightly tethered to the current set of MDGs - goals that would continue to focus on poverty, health, education, gender and would add a couple new topics such as sustainable development or infrastructure.
  - And then you have dozens if not hundreds of groups advocating for their particular goal or theme – Peace. Private sector. Climate. Rights. No one understandably wants to be left out.
  - Tough choices will need to be made and that will perhaps be the biggest challenge for the post-2015 HLP and the Open Working Group for the SDGs. What issues to prioritize? What should the goals focus on? What shouldn't they focus on?

**Fourth proposition: Goals should be universal.**

- Already mentioned that if global collective action problems are to be addressed (such as climate change, migration) goals will need to engage all countries, not just developing ones.

- But universal is not just about which countries are engaged but it's also about how we engage the explosion of aid agencies. Development assistance landscape is much more complex today.
    - Traditional bilateral and multilateral ODA (the DFIDs, World Banks) represent a decreasing share (about 50%) of aid.
    - Non-OECD aid (China, Brazil) and private grants (Gates) are expanding dramatically.
    - Moreover, traditional ODA (a smaller slice of the pie) is itself becoming increasingly fragmented (more vertical funds such as Global Fund to Fight Aids, TB and Malaria).
    - Shared goals can help ensure coherence in the programming of development aid.
  - But universal also in terms of the private sector
    - Private (non-concessional) financial flows into developing countries significantly outweigh ODA.
    - Private sector accounts for 70-80% of global GDP
- ➔ The goals must engage not just aid agencies and developing countries (like the MDGs did) but also developed countries, new players in international aid, the private sector and public at large.

**Fifth proposition: Goals should be informed by an open, inclusive process.**

- One of the criticisms of the MDGs is that the process to construct them was not sufficiently inclusive. Much greater effort is being taken this time to consult widely.
- But the post-2015 discussion so far has not adequately reflected perhaps the most important stakeholder in my view – the poor themselves
- Logic for reaching out to the poor is self-evident - to understand how they define poverty, what are the barriers as they see them, what needs to change. Fortunately, some new NGO initiatives to engage the poor directly in the post-2105 discussions have emerged. This is excellent and should be built upon.

Close with a story - Many of you have heard of the Tata family in India. The founder – Jamsed Tata -- was a legendary industrialist who was notoriously protective of his privacy. So it came as a shock to a young reporter when he granted her request for an interview - on one condition: she could only ask three questions. When the day of the interview arrived, she sat down and said: "You are one of the most successful people in the world and your business has redefined industry in India. What has made you so successful?" He replied: "Good decisions." She waited and waited but he said nothing else. She reflected a bit and then asked: "Well, how did you make such good decisions?" He replied: "Experience." She was beside herself. Two questions and he had answered with only three words! So she thought long and hard about her last question: "How did you get this experience?" Jamsed Tata replied, with a wry smile, "Bad decisions."

- Story is relevant here in that we need to correct the shortcomings of the current MDGs (the need to address sustainability and equity, the need for universal goals). But the MDGs have many terrific features as well (focus on a few, simple goals, a compelling narrative). The challenge is tackling the shortcomings while at the same time ensuring that the good things are not lost in the process.

---



---

**Mr. Manish Bapna, *Executive Vice-President and Managing Director, World Resources Institute***