

**Title: Post-2015 global goal setting: attention to ownership, partnership and evidence needed**

The Third Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was held from 22-24 May 2013 at the newly established conference room in the United Nations (UN) Headquarters, New York. The OWG has decided to cover a different set of themes for each of the planned sessions through February 2014 (eight sessions in total). The themes featured in the recently completed session were food security, water, sustainable agriculture, desertification, and land degradation. In parallel, the final report of the High Level Panel on Post-2015 Development Agenda was released on the 30 May. In looking at the outcomes of these two processes and proposals on new Post-2015 goals, three buzzwords caught our attention: “*Ownership*”, “*Partnership*” and “*Evidence*”.

**1. *More ownership, more progress***

There is general consensus throughout the OWG and HLP discussions that new Post-2015 goals should be universally applicable based on broad goals that can then be adopted at national and local levels. But striking a balance between global goals and national priorities presents a formidable challenge. Experience with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)



suggests that global goals give countries incentives to collect data and adopt national policies because they want to “look good” on the international stage. However, such kind of indirect “peer pressure” at the global level can also yield undesirable results at the national and local levels. For example, the MDGs were designed chiefly for communication and monitoring not planning; however, governments often used the MDGs for planning purposes. Two sets of problems stemmed from the tendency to use the goals for these purposes. Not only could the eight MDGs not hope to accommodate the diverse circumstances that are central to national planning, but also many planning priorities were given insufficient attention because they were not MDGs. For a new set of global goals, it will be important to set goals, targets and indicators at a global level but take equal care in making them adaptable to national conditions. In short, countries will need to own the goals.

**2. *More partnership, more ownership***

At the international level, it is often said that MDGs gave UN agencies incentives to coordinate internally within the UN system. But with no specific UN agency responsible for the implementation of each MDG, the track record varied greatly from one goal to the next. Moreover, MDG 4 (reduce child mortality), MDG 5 (improve maternal health), and MDG 6 (combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases), are all related to health issues but without a coordinating body there was no linkage made between related goals. As a result, many of the UN organizations charged with implementing health-related goals had overlapping mandates and programmes of work. To date, the current OWG and Post-2015 discussions seemed to have overlooked this pitfall, emphasizing instead financial assistance, technology transfer, and capacity building as of means of implementation. Not only will UN-level coordination be important for the global goals, but more attention will be needed to what kind of goals could offer incentives for information-sharing, coordination, and monitoring and evaluation beyond the UN. This latter set of concerns can, yet again, not just enhance one but multiple stakeholders' ownership. Attention to these concerns will also benefit from greater partnership between different actors and agencies at all levels.

### ***3. More evidence, more effective negotiations***

During the third OWG, many delegates stressed the importance of issue linkages such as the water-food-energy nexus, but understanding on these interrelationships remains relatively limited at this point. To a certain extent, this is understandable as sustainable development issues are complex, often requiring many years to master just one cross cutting relationship. This may be less of a problem when goals are clearly synergistic like climate change, deforestation and renewable energy (achieving targets on deforestation and renewable energy would contribute to achieving the target on climate change). But it could pose a sizable impediment for goals that potentially run at odds such as when boosting access to energy requires unsustainable levels of water use. To ensure synergies and minimize trade-offs, it is critical evidence-based science informs negotiations. Without greater reference to science, negotiations will easily fall to political calculations. The emergence of politics cannot only stall negotiations but undermine both ownership and partnership.

#### ***The way forward***

The HLP final report and many other reports with proposed sets of goals have already been released, including the report from Jeffrey Sach's Sustainable Development Solutions Network. Against the backdrop of these proposals, it is critical that the upcoming OWGs consider a few points. First, the new goals need to be negotiated from the perspective of "ownership" so that multi-stakeholders at all levels would be motivated to work together in partnership. This becomes particularly important when the global goals are underpinned by targets and indicators, which are to be

selected and adapted at the national level to reflect national conditions and priorities. Second, the set of proposed goals need to be considered from an integrated perspective; single-issue thinking can render suboptimal results. Finally, it is crucial that negotiators draw more upon science to limit political calculations that undermine a more holistic understanding of the post-2015 Development Agenda. According to the current programme of work, the OWG should identify priority areas to be included in SDGs by the next February 2014. We hope that the three buzzwords highlighted in the commentary--ownership, partnership, and evidence--feature prominently in discussions leading up to that date.

(End)

<Reference>

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