

The United Nations in the Age of Sustainable Development

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I SUMMARY

Achieving sustainable development will be the over-riding challenge of this century. Throughout most of history, the challenges of integrating economic development, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability were local or regional. In the 21st century, however, they are indisputably global. Only through global cooperation can individual nations overcome the interconnected crises of extreme poverty, economic instability, social inequality, and environmental degradation.

In the Age of Sustainable Development, the United Nations will be more essential than ever. As foreseen in the UN Charter, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) is the world's meeting ground for global cooperation, and UN agencies have specialised knowledge of essential global importance. Yet the UN will have to be organised to succeed in this unprecedented challenge, to ensure much higher levels of accountability, timeliness, efficiency, and political commitment of the Member States and the UN itself. The proposal made at

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the 2012 Rio+20 Summit for a new High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) led by Heads of State and Government to oversee the UN's new mandate in sustainable development is, in this regard, a critical starting point.¹

The crises of sustainable development have already become crises of national and global security. Every country faces increasingly complex challenges of energy, food, and water security. Every country faces the crisis of rising frequency and the intensity of natural disasters, with a soaring number of floods, droughts, heat waves, extreme storms, and forest fires. Every country faces the unsolved problems of jobs for its young people, and many poor countries have populations growing too fast to meet the needs of education and jobs. Many of the world's conflicts – in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, Syria, and Western Asia – are being stoked by droughts, famines, mass migration, and other symptoms of economic, social, and environmental unsustainability.

This is no time for despair, but for resolve. The United Nations must be the vital centre of the sustainable development effort, one that draws on every stakeholder: private businesses, non-governmental organisations, universities and research centres, international financial institutions, and the UN organs themselves.

At the 2012 Rio+20 Summit, world leaders charged the UN General Assembly with three key missions: to define Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to identify the financial means for their fulfilment, and to identify the needed inter-governmental machinery in the UNGA and ECOSOC for the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. The practical UN problem – a challenge of historic dimension – is how to support countries at various levels of economic development to work together to end extreme poverty, transition to a low-carbon world energy system, ensure food and water security, reduce high fertility rates, and make the world's cities productive and resilient to environmental stresses. The SDGs need to create a new era of change, rooted in global solidarity, optimism, and the sense that humanity can solve the many difficult problems of a crowded and environmentally stressed planet.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) illustrate how global goals can promote change. The MDG process has included several highly effective UN initiatives to provide guidance, oversight, and monitoring of the MDG processes. In addition to the UN activities, the MDGs have spurred dozens of major initiatives around the world by donor governments, leading NGOs, the G8, the G20, major foundations, and ad hoc coalitions of countries. Progress in many areas was accelerated after the year 2000, and the coherence of development efforts was enhanced. The overarching lesson is that global

¹ See References for list of important policy documents.

development goals can indeed help to organise, motivate, mobilise, and even inspire the international community to accelerated action.

In addition to the SDGs, the 2012 Rio+20 Summit rightly underscored the need for creative approaches to global financing for sustainable development. This is a complex topic, and one that is now being considered by a special Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing mandated by the Rio+20 Summit in *The Future We Want*. Development assistance will continue to be vital, but so too will innovative public-private partnerships to mobilise large-scale financing, for example to provide for sustainable energy and urban infrastructure.

Sustainable development will also require the leadership of the world's multinational corporations, which are the most powerful actors in the global scene. One can say that they constitute the foundation of the new globalisation. Global companies have a reach and power that dwarfs that of most nation states. Their economic might is reflected in their political influence, their ability to sway national and global regulations, and their potential to speed or hinder the technological and policy transitions to sustainable development. The enlightened members of the global business community understand the stakes and are prepared to lead.

The success of the SDGs will depend on much greater UN coherence and accountability. The UN Secretary General should be tasked with the overall guidance of the UN's sustainable development agenda, including the process of making strategic recommendations to Member States, overseeing the monitoring and evaluation of processes in place, and mobilising the requisite cooperation of the UN agencies. The UN General Assembly has the mandate to agree on the SDGs; set an overall strategy; adopt milestones and timetables for the period to 2030; monitor annual progress; and make periodic recommendations on needed course corrections. This vital agenda calls for nothing short of the revitalisation of the General Assembly as the unique venue for international cooperation at the highest levels for economic, social, and environmental matters.

The High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) will bring the SDGs to the highest political level and focus. The HLPF will organise *quadrennial summits of Heads of State and Government* around the SDGs. Annual meetings of the HLPF, under the Chairmanship of ECOSOC, and mainly at ministerial level, will enable governments to weigh in on the progress and challenges of achieving the SDGs.

The UNGA would also establish several standing committees to oversee progress on the SDGs and the major means of implementation. These would also present reports and make recommendations for corrective or accelerated

action by the UNGA including the establishment of a ranking system of SDG progress, in addition to conducting reviews of the compliance of the work of various branches and agencies of the UN System to the post-2015 agenda as set by Member States. Such a mechanism would heighten their accountability to the membership. In order to secure the requisite political backing of Heads of State or Government, these committees should be chaired by their peers, namely Heads of State or Government of countries chosen for the task.

A crucial pillar for UNGA leadership will be an effective bridge with the G20, the current forum for the world's major economies and with the international financial institutions, including the Bretton Woods institutions and the multilateral development banks. The UN should form a strong consultative process with the world's finance ministers. Another crucial pillar will be a bridge to state-of-the-art scientific knowledge on sustainable development, both for guiding the work program of the UN, and for advising Member States on best practices and building local capacities. In this regard, the new UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) should play a key role. The SDG agenda should also be incorporated into the work programs of other UN bodies usually considered to be outside of the main mandates of sustainable development.

There is a short window until 2015. The world faces the need for important and specific decisions to be taken on a tight timetable. These include agreement on the overall SDG framework by 2015; agreement on the roles of the HLPF and ECOSOC, and agreement on the mechanisms of the UNGA standing committees; and the incorporation of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network into the work program of the UNGA and HLPF.

We also invite UN Member States to consider adopting a Universal Declaration of Sustainable Development, incorporating the SDGs but affirming their centrality by putting the sustainable development agenda on the highest plane of urgency.

The SDGs therefore have a special role to play not only in guiding the work of the global community, but also creating awareness in the global public. Their force, ultimately, will come from public acceptance, and from public recognition of the urgent need to change how we live, work, and use natural resources. Most importantly, the SDGs must help the world to understand, and feel, the many reasons for optimism.

The world can coalesce around a common agenda. The wonders of modern science and technology, the history of positive cooperation with the MDGs and other initiatives, and our generation's opportunity to forge a shared commitment for human betterment, all are reasons to redouble our efforts.

Our common fate and our generation's place in the great moral chain of humanity call us to action.

SDSN List of Illustrative Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

- Goal 1: End Extreme Poverty Including Hunger.
- Goal 2: Achieve Development within Planetary Boundaries.
- Goal 3: Ensure Effective Learning for All Children and Youth for Life and Livelihood.
- Goal 4: Achieve Gender Equality, Social Inclusion, and Human Rights for All.
- Goal 5: Achieve Health and Wellbeing at all Ages.
- Goal 6: Improve Agriculture Systems and Raise Rural Prosperity.
- Goal 7: Empower Inclusive, Productive, and Resilient Cities.
- Goal 8: Curb Human-Induced Climate Change and Ensure Sustainable Energy.
- Goal 9: Secure Ecosystem Services and Biodiversity, and Ensure Good Management of Water and Other Natural Resources.
- Goal 10: Transform Governance for Sustainable Development.

II THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE AGE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Achieving sustainable development will be the world's over-riding challenge in this century. Throughout most of human history, the challenges of integrating economic development, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability were local or perhaps regional. In the 21st century, however, they are indisputably global. Only through global cooperation can individual nations overcome the interconnected crises of extreme poverty, economic instability, social inequality, and environmental degradation.

The United Nations is more essential than ever in this era of unprecedented and increasing interdependence. Our fates are bound together in a globalised economic and financial system, planetary-scale environmental threats, war and violence that spill across national boundaries, and public health crises such as emerging infectious diseases that quickly take on a global character. As foreseen in the UN Charter, global cooperation through the United Nations is essential to face these global-scale challenges. Yet the UN will have to be restructured to succeed in this unprecedented challenge, to ensure a much higher level of accountability, timeliness, efficiency, and political commitment of the member states and UN itself.

The world was first put on notice of the impending collision course between global economic growth and global environmental sustainability more than four decades ago, at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Stockholm in June 1972. Twenty years later, at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, UN Member States adopted three international treaties – on climate change (UNFCCC), biodiversity (CBD), and desertification (UNCCD) – to head off the growing threats of human-induced environmental destruction. Yet when UN Member States met once again in Rio at the 2012 Rio+20 Summit, they grimly noted that forty years after the first warnings, and twenty years after signing three pivotal treaties, humanity continued its perilous trajectory past planetary limits.

The crises of sustainable development have already become crises of national and global security. Every country faces increasingly complex challenges of energy, food, and water security. Every country faces the crisis of rising frequency and intensity of natural disasters, with a soaring number of floods, droughts, heat waves, extreme storms, and forest fires. Every country faces the unsolved problems of jobs for its young people, and many poor countries have populations growing too fast to meet the needs of education and jobs. Globalisation and technological change have richly rewarded those at the top of the income distribution, but left a generation of young people in economic peril. Protests in cities around the world testify to the rising tensions of high levels of income inequality and joblessness.

Many of the world's conflict zones – in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, Syria, and Western Asia – are dry land regions already suffering from rising hunger caused by falling rainfall intersecting with rising populations. Conflicts are typically interpreted as crises of politics and religion. Yet we should have no doubt: these conflicts are also being stoked by droughts, famines, mass migration, and other symptoms of economic, social, and environmental unsustainability.

This is no time for despair, but for resolve. We have seen the potential for rapid technological advances that can cut poverty and save lives. Since 1990, the rate of poverty in the developing world has fallen by half, with most of the gains coming from China. Yet sub-Saharan Africa too has begun to reduce its poverty rate, and these gains can be accelerated. Disease burdens of malaria, HIV/AIDS, and other killers that once ran out of control are now coming down thanks to the hard work of governments and NGOs backed by the latest scientific and technological advances.

The United Nations, established to be “a centre for harmonising the actions of nations,” will be the vital centre of the sustainable development effort, one that draws on every stakeholder: private businesses, non-governmental organisations, universities and research centres, international financial institutions, and of course the UN organs themselves. The key UN

leadership role is underscored by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in his recent report on *A Life of Dignity for All*, supported by the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development and the report of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN).

2.1 *The UN We Need*

A successful transition to sustainable development will last, at the minimum, until mid-century, with an urgent phase during 2015-2030. Even the most powerful and largest countries cannot succeed in this transition on their own. Nor are the international financial institutions (including the World Bank, IMF, and multilateral development banks) able to lead this process, though they are indeed crucial for its success. Only the UN has the capacity to lead it, for five reasons:

- The issues are global and only the UN has the political legitimacy to address deep global challenges;
- Sustainable development belongs to the core purposes of the UN, notably: “To achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights [...] and to be a centre for harmonising the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends.” (UN Charter, Article I)
- The issues cut across diplomatic, strategic, cultural, and economic domains;
- The issues require the ability to tap global expert knowledge in multiple disciplines;
- The issues require measurement, monitoring, coordination, and oversight.

In the concluding document to the 2012 Rio+20 Summit entitled *The World We Want*, the UN General Assembly was charged with three key missions: to define Sustainable Development Goals, to identify the financial means for their fulfilment, and to identify the needed inter-governmental machinery in the UNGA and ECOSOC for the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. This includes the creation of a new High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) of Heads of State and Government to guide the SDGs in future years. This clear mandate from Rio+20 sets the stage for the General Assembly's further revitalisation.

The practical UN problem – a challenge of historic dimension – is how to support countries at various levels of economic development to work together to end extreme poverty, transition to a low-carbon world energy system, ensure food and water security, reduce high fertility rates, promote the rights of women and children, support youth employment, secure universal access to

quality healthcare and education, and make the world's cities productive and resilient to environmental stresses. The SDGs need to create a new era of change, rooted in global solidarity, optimism, and the sense that humanity can solve the many difficult problems of a crowded and environmentally stressed planet.

2.1.1 There Are Reasons for Optimism

First, the world is enjoying a great wave of technological advance, mainly around information and communications technologies (ICTs), genomics, and advanced materials using nanotechnology. These technologies clusters are poised to usher in a new era of resource conservation, one that can constitute the sixth major technology era since the start of the Industrial Revolution (with each era characterised by a major class of inventions): 1780-1830, the steam engine; 1830-1880, rail and steel; 1880-1930, electrification and chemistry; 1930-1970, automobiles and petrochemicals; 1970-2010, ICTs; and 2010 onward, sustainable development.

Second, the world is rapidly urbanising. This is a cause for optimism since cities are more conducive to technological advance and the provision of key infrastructure (e.g., roads, power, water and sewerage).

Third, the world population growth is generally slowing down, though it remains extremely high in the poorest region, sub-Saharan Africa. Slower population growth, marked by low fertility rates and smaller families, helps societies to protect the natural environment and to invest more heavily in the human capital (health, nutrition, and education) of each child. This is also achievable in Africa with the right policy support.

2.1.2 Yet The Challenges Are Also Daunting, Again, Consider Three Reasons

First, there is tremendous momentum in the BAU global trajectory. Around the world most countries are continuing to do things the old way. The old industries – especially the fossil-fuel-based industries – are resisting the needed changes, and often lobbying against them. Governments have not yet reformed internally or agreed internationally on how to bring about rapid change. Business horizons are generally too short term for businesses to provide the necessary leadership.

Second, time is very short. The challenges of sustainable development were first brought to the global agenda 40 years ago at the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, yet there was relatively little practical change in global policies as a result of that historic meeting. Twenty years later at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the UN Members States agreed on three critical treaties: the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the

UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). Yet once again, implementation fell far short of the vision. Another twenty years later at the 2012 Rio+20 Summit, the UN Member States agreed to establish Sustainable Development Goals to accelerate global action.

From 1972 to 2012, vital time was lost in heading off environmental calamity. CO₂ concentrations in 1972 stood at 327 parts per million (ppm). By 1992, CO₂ concentrations had already reached 356 ppm, above the danger zone of 350 ppm. As of 2013, we've reached 400 ppm. With a few brief years, unless we choose otherwise, we have lost the chance of avoiding more than a 2-degrees-C increase in the Earth's average temperature. We will continue to mouth the words of 2-degree targets, but reality will have moved on. Many of our own generation, and vastly more of our children's generation, will pay a fearful price. We will have failed our generation's fundamental duty of stewardship.

Third, global cooperation is difficult. The problem of allocating responsibilities across countries has proved to be daunting, in part because there has been insufficient trust that countries will fulfil their respective mandates. Many high-income countries insist that the developing countries join the effort of climate-change mitigation, for example, while the developing countries insist that the high-income world should move first in line with the responsibilities under the UNFCCC. In the meantime, promised official development assistance has not come at the levels once promised, and this too has led to recriminations and finger pointing. The new SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda, including a new climate agreement scheduled to be concluded at COP21 in France in 2015, will need to bridge these divides.

Perhaps the greatest challenge is that unlike most of economic development, indeed since the onset of the Industrial Revolution roughly 250 years ago, the next technological age will have to be actively steered. In the past, technologies unfolded in a kind of open-ended process. From coal to steel to internal combustion to automobiles, electrification, aviation, and information technology, technologies evolved through global market dynamics, the pressures of war, the forces of geopolitics, and so forth. The technological environment evolved; by and large, it was not actively created. Now we need an act of human creation: to shift our technologies from heavy resource use to sustainable patterns of production and consumption.

2.2 *How Global Goals Can Motivate Action*

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) offer an illustration of how global goals can promote change, and also some of the limitations. In the Millennium Declaration of September 2000, world leaders adopted the eight

MDGs for the period 2000-2015. The UN defined more detailed targets (around 20) and indicators (around 60) to support the MDGs. In addition, the Millennium Declaration called for an International Conference on Financing for Development that took place in Monterrey, Mexico in March 2002. The MDG process has included several UN initiatives to provide guidance, oversight, and monitoring of the MDG processes, including:

- The UN Millennium Project, to mobilise global expertise on setting a roadmap to achieve the MDGs.
- The 2005 World Summit, a special session of the UN General Assembly that adopted key recommendations on a ten-year plan of action.
- The 2010 UN Summit on the MDGs, a special session of the UN General Assembly that agreed on actions for the final 5 years of the MDGs.
- The 2013 UN MDG Review Summit, to support a final push to 2015.
- UN initiatives such as Every Woman, Every Child, a program of the UN Secretary-General to implement the *Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health*.
- An Annual Millennium Development Goals Report prepared by the UN Secretariat, and supported by the UN Statistics Division.

In addition to the UN activities, the MDGs have spurred dozens of major initiatives around the world by donor governments, leading NGOs, the G8, the G20, major foundations, and ad hoc coalitions of countries. Notable actions organised to help achieve the MDGs include:

- The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria.
- The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisations.
- The Global Agriculture and Food Security Program at the World Bank.
- The G8 Gleneagles Summit in 2005.
- The UN Millennium Villages Project, to design and demonstrate a multi-sector approach to achieving the MDGs in low-income rural settings.
- Major academic studies on pathways to the MDGs, such as a series of path-breaking best practice studies in public health published in *The Lancet*.

These initiatives have broadly been successful in raising the profile and priority of poverty reduction in national and international programs. Progress in many areas was accelerated after the year 2000, and the coherence of development efforts was enhanced. Of course there have also been many failures that need to be understood and acknowledged. Most importantly, most donor countries did not follow through on key ODA pledges made in 2002 (Monterrey) and 2005 (Gleneagles). Many UN agencies worked with

inadequate precision and focus. The overall statistical effort to support national and global MDG monitoring has been too slow and incomplete. Major countries were distracted from MDG commitments because of other priorities (for example, post-9/11 and following the 2008 financial crisis).

The overarching lesson, however, is that global development goals can indeed help to organise, motivate, mobilise, and even inspire the international community to accelerated action. In a complicated world with diverse intellectual, geopolitical, economic, and even moral agendas, the world can coalesce around shared objectives and move complicated processes (donor assistance, national legislation, development strategies) in the direction of the desired goals. The UN's own efforts have involved the leadership of the UN Secretary-General in providing overall strategic steering of the 15-year effort; active cooperation of the UN agencies; full participation of the UN General Assembly in adopting strategies and monitoring the entire process; and the overall goodwill of the UN Member States.

US President John F. Kennedy, in the pursuit of peace with the Soviet Union in 1963 said this about goal setting:

By defining our goal more clearly – by making it seem more manageable and less remote – we help all people to see it, to draw hope from it, and to move irresistibly toward it.

This position has been vindicated by the MDGs. They have helped to make the goals of ending poverty, hunger, and avoidable disease seem more manageable, and they have indeed helped people around the world to move irresistibly toward the end of extreme poverty, an objective that is now widely regarded as a practical policy for the 2015-2030 development agenda.

2.3 *Setting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*

The concept of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was adopted at Rio+20 in the final outcome document *The Future We Want*. The Member States noted that a set of SDGs "... could also be useful for pursuing focused and coherent action on sustainable development." In defining the SDGs, the governments agreed on the following overarching points:

We also underscore that SDGs should be action-oriented, concise and easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries while taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities. We also recognise that the goals should address and be focused on priority areas for the achieve-

ment of sustainable development, being guided by this outcome document. Governments should drive implementation with the active involvement of all relevant stakeholders, as appropriate. (paragraph 247)

In its detailed recommendations to the UN Secretary-General and the UN General Assembly on the design of the SDGs, the new UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network made the following overarching points very much in line with *The Future We Want*:

- The goals should be no more than 10 in number, so that they can be clearly understood by the global public.
- The SDGs will be complementary to the tools of international law, such as global treaties and conventions, by providing a shared normative framework that fosters collaboration across countries.
- The SDGs should mobilise governments and the international system to strengthen measurement and monitoring for sustainable development.
- The SDGs should promote integrated thinking along the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social, environmental) supported by good governance.
- The SDGs should be operational and help countries, businesses, and civil society address the sustainable development priorities.
- The SDGs should be universal, applying to rich and poor countries alike, and targeting not only governments but also business and civil society.
- The SDGs should give voice to the poor, and ensure the participation and voice of the poor in decision making.
- The SDGs should be bolstered by significant improvements in local, national, and global data collection and processing, using new tools (GIS, remote sensing, social networking, etc.) to help produce data that are online, real-time, place-based, and highly disaggregated.
- The SDGs should be dynamic to incorporate scientific, technological, economic, and environmental changes during 2015-2030 that cannot be anticipated fully today.

The SDSN proposed an illustrative list of SDGs, shown in Annex 1. There are 10 proposed SDGs (each with 3 targets, for a total of 30 specific targets, which may be found in the SDSN Report). They cover the three main dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social, and environmental – underpinned by good governance. They address all key challenges that have been widely recognised as priorities in the post-2015 period, including the ending of extreme poverty; the right to development, with the key proviso that such development must be within planetary boundaries; the need for social

inclusion, both in terms of human rights and in terms of reducing extreme inequalities of income; the creation of needed skills and jobs for young people; and the urgency of steps to ensure environmental sustainability.

Some have asked about simply extending the Millennium Development Goals for another 15 years. This is not adequate. On the one hand, SDGs should certainly commit to finishing the task of the MDGs, and specifically to end extreme poverty by 2030. That should be SDG 1! On the other hand, even if the end of poverty could be achieved by 2030, the gains will not last long *unless other dimensions of sustainable development are also put in place*. If our societies become so unequal in wealth and power that social stability is lost, then any gains on poverty would be short lived. If the global environmental crisis deepens, then gains in ending poverty will also be lost to soaring food prices, increasing natural disasters, greater water scarcity, and the collapsing habitability of many parts of the world, starting with the dry lands of the Sahel, Horn of Africa, West Asia, and Central Asia, regions that are already economic, social, and political tinder boxes. The moral of the story is that we must move beyond the MDGs to a more comprehensive and universal set of SDGs, but as the goals expand in scope and complexity, we should not lose sight of the priority of ending extreme poverty as was so neatly encapsulated by the MDGs.

The Future We Want also rightly emphasises the need for agreements on four major dimensions of implementation, including:

- Finance, recognising “... the need for significant mobilisation of resources from a variety of sources and effective use of financing”;
- Technology, including previous agreements “... to promote, facilitate and finance, as appropriate, access to and the development, transfer and diffusion of environmentally sound technologies and corresponding know-how, in particular to developing countries, on favorable terms”;
- Capacity building, reiterating the importance of human resource development, including training, exchange of experiences and expertise, knowledge transfer and technical assistance for capacity building;
- Trade, including the completion of a development-oriented trade round.

2.4 *Public and Private Financing for Sustainable Development*

The Rio+20 Summit rightly underscored the need for creative approaches to global financing for sustainable development. This is a complex topic, and one that is now being considered by a special Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing mandated by the Rio+20 Summit in *The Future We Want*.

The issues, briefly put, include the following. First, there is the ongoing need for official development assistance (ODA) to enable the world's poorest countries to achieve the MDGs, end extreme poverty, and graduate from ODA by reaching middle-income status. By 2030, all of the world's countries can achieve middle-income status. At that point, ODA can be considerably reduced if not eliminated. Yet until then, considerable ODA flows will still be needed. The SDSN has estimated that the 0.7 per cent of GNI donor commitment on ODA (only fulfilled by 5 donor countries) should remain vigilant until around 2025, after which it will begin to decline as countries graduate to middle-income status.

There are improved ways to implement these ongoing flows of ODA. The most successful ODA programs during the MDG period have involved the pooling of donor resources into global funds, such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria, and the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisations. Pooling of ODA has reduced transactions costs and improved expert oversight and monitoring of aid flows. Similar global funds would be very useful for education, water and sanitation, and energy for all.

Sustainable development finance will also be needed on several fronts not currently part of ODA. Most importantly, donor countries have pledged \$100 billion per year to support developing countries to address climate change, both for mitigation (i.e. decarbonisation of the energy system) and adaptation (i.e. resilience for urban and rural areas). A new global institution, the Green Climate Fund, has been established, yet little progress has been made in setting modalities for raising the large promised sum. One of the highest priorities facing the UN will be to secure the promised \$100 billion per year in climate financing in timely and predictable manner.

The Global Environment Facility is the world's main financing instrument for conservation of biodiversity. It has a distinguished track record, yet is chronically underfunded. With its new vigorous leadership, and with intensified support from the UN system, the GEF should play a pre-eminent role in ecosystem conservation and the protection of biodiversity.

Another area requiring substantial financial innovation will be the large scale-up of sustainable technologies, for example, the transition to electrified public transport, long-distance transmission of low-carbon electricity, etc. In many cases, this kind of financing will require new public-private partnerships (PPPs), involving novel financing arrangements and risk sharing between the global public and private sectors.

A crucial and as yet largely unexplored area of financing will be the massive outlays for research, development, demonstration, and diffusion (RDD&D) of cutting-edge sustainable technologies. Technology innovation and transfer are among the most important instruments of sustainable

development, yet the financing of RDD&D does not fit easily with a world of privately owned intellectual property. New methods of financing the rapid development and diffusion of “green” technologies will be needed, and several models have been proposed, but little practical progress has been made in implementing these novel approaches.

In all of these challenges, the International Financial Institutions (IFI), including the IMF and World Bank and the multilateral development banks, and donor agencies in donor countries, will have a crucial role to play. The IMF and World Bank need to work closely with each other and with the rest of the UN system, to ensure that official development financing, global financial regulations, and global macroeconomic management, are all well harmonised with the objectives of the SDGs. Fortunately, the IMF and World Bank are very interested in getting on board. The multilateral development banks will be major financiers of infrastructure, increasingly via public-private partnerships. The IFIs will need to increase their ability to tap into and partner with long-term financing from pension funds, insurance companies, sovereign wealth funds, national development banks, and other sources of capital outside of the multilateral institutions.

The sustainable development agenda will not move forward unless these financial innovations are achieved, and that will not happen unless the world’s finance ministers have a central role in the SDG process. This not only means that the IMF, World Bank, and multilateral development banks must be engaged, as they are the meeting points of the world’s finance ministers, but also that the UN must re-engage directly with the finance ministers, including an annual meeting together at the UN, perhaps following the fall IMF and World Bank meetings each year.

2.5 The Pivotal Role of Private Business

Sustainable development will require the leadership of the world’s multinational corporations, which are the most powerful actors in the global scene. One can say that they constitute the foundation of the new globalisation. Global companies have a reach and power that dwarfs that of most nation states. As of 2012, the world’s multinational companies had total assets of \$86 trillion, more than global world product. They employed 72 million workers. Sales by foreign affiliates amounted to \$26 trillion. This economic might is reflected in their political influence, their ability to sway national and global regulations, and their potential to speed or hinder the technological and policy transitions to sustainable development.

The enlightened members of the global business community understand the stakes and are prepared to lead. They know that there is no long-term future for their companies unless their markets are economically stable,

socially fair, and environmental sustainable. These leaders are raising their voice regarding the urgency of a new direction, and are supporting efforts by the United Nations to forge Sustainable Development Goals. Yet other companies, including major companies in oil, coal, and gas, are not only delaying their own adjustments but are spending funds and political capital to lobby nation states against action. They are contributing to public confusion through anti-science rhetoric and public relations.

Achieving Sustainable Development necessarily constitutes a public-private partnership of unprecedented depth, breadth, and intensity. Private business dominates the world economy. Private business holds the intellectual property of key technologies; and private business constitutes the most effective large-scale management systems in the world.

The UN will, therefore, have an unprecedented role in partnering with far-sighted and accountable businesses, while working with them to hold the laggards to account. The UN Global Compact is well suited to take on this larger role, in conjunction with the rest of the UN work on sustainable development. The Global Compact can organise a Sustainable Development Business Forum that will participate in the annual ECOSOC meetings and the quadrennial summits of Heads of State and Government. The Global Compact would presumably also draw on the World Economic Forum, the International Chamber of Commerce, the World Business Council on Sustainable Development, and other major business networks working in this sphere. Fortunately, business engagement in sustainable development is an area where foresight and long-term benefit will coincide. Businesses that take the lead in sustainable development today will be the champions of the world economy in the future.

2.6 Reform of United Nations Institutions

The challenge of setting and implementing SDGs will constitute the largest and most ambitious global development agenda ever undertaken. Nothing less is needed in view of the seriousness and urgency of the challenges facing humanity. Nothing less is warranted, moreover, in view of the massive benefits that can be garnered by mobilising our fast-developing stock of technological breakthroughs on behalf of humanity. We are motivated in short both by the grave risks and the path-breaking opportunities that confront this generation.

The UN processes will need considerable upgrading to help underpin these tasks. The MDG experience gives us hope, but also reasons for concern. Global goal setting and follow through is feasible, but is easily distracted by the powerful currents of daily events. In the case of the SDGs, various vested economic and political interests may also try to undermine coherence and progress.

The success of the SDGs will depend on a coherent process of UN leadership. The UN Secretary General should be tasked with the overall guidance of the UN's sustainable development agenda, including the process of making strategic recommendations to Member States, overseeing the monitoring and evaluation of processes in place, and mobilising the requisite cooperation of the UN agencies. The UN General Assembly has the mandate to agree on the SDGs, set an overall strategy, adopt milestones and timetables for the period to 2030, monitor annual progress, and make periodic recommendations on needed course corrections. This vital agenda calls for nothing short of the revitalisation of the General Assembly as the unique venue for international cooperation at the highest levels for economic, social, and environmental matters.

The 2012 Rio+20 call for a new High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) under the General Assembly is very important in this regard. As described in *The Future We Want*, the HLPF will be "... a universal intergovernmental high-level political forum, building on the strengths, experiences, resources and inclusive participation modalities of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and subsequently replacing the Commission." The HLPF will engage Heads of State and Government in the sustainable development challenge on an ongoing basis, and especially in quadrennial summits to be organised around the SDGs. Annual meetings of the HLPF, under the Chairmanship of ECOSOC, and at ministerial level, will enable governments to weigh in on the progress and challenges of achieving the SDGs.

The HLPF, in conjunction with ECOSOC and the UN Secretariat, should create an annual work program on the SDGs that is set within a multi-year framework of action, all of which should be adopted by the UNGA. The UNGA would also establish several standing committees composed of Member State representatives on a rotating basis to oversee progress on the SDGs and the major means of implementation. This would include committees to oversee the individual SDGs (for example 5 standing committees, each overseeing two of the SDGs) and also to oversee crosscutting challenges (e.g., finance, technology, capacity building, trade). These committees would work throughout the year, drawing on global experts, to review programs, identify best practices, and draw attention to programmatic gaps and challenges that should be addressed by the global political leadership and the UNGA.

The UNGA standing committees would also present reports and make recommendations for corrective or accelerated action by the UNGA (including the establishment of a ranking system of SDG progress), in addition to conducting reviews of the compliance of the work of various branches and agencies of the UN System to the post-2015 agenda as set by Member States. Such a mechanism would heighten their accountability to the membership.

In order to secure the requisite political backing of Heads of State or Government, these committees should be chaired by their peers, namely Heads of State or Government of countries chosen for the task.

An annual ministerial meeting, under the auspices of the HLPF and led by ECOSOC, will review the global, regional, and national progress towards the SDGs. The Secretary-General would provide a report from DESA and the UN Statistical Division on SDG progress.

Another crucial pillar for UNGA leadership is the effective bridge with the G20, the current forum for the world's major economies. Thanks to the recent initiatives of the UN General Assembly, the UNGA and the G20 have agreed to close ongoing cooperation. This not only brings the UNGA into all crucial policy discussions on the global economy and global finance, but also brings the G20 into responsibility vis-à-vis the SDGs. In other words, the UNGA is a vital bridge to help ensure that the most powerful economies in the world fulfil their responsibilities vis-à-vis the SDGs. A similar bridge can and should be built towards a stronger relationship of the IMF and World Bank with the UNGA.

One of the most important challenges for the UN is to mobilise state-of-the-art scientific knowledge on sustainable development, both for guiding the work program of the UN, and for advising Member States on best practices and building local capacities. This is well recognised in *The Future We Want*:

We recognise the important contribution of the scientific and technological community to sustainable development. We are committed to working with and fostering collaboration among academic, scientific and technological community, in particular in developing countries, to close the technological gap between developing and developed countries, strengthen the science-policy interface as well as to foster international research collaboration on sustainable development. (paragraph 48)

In this regard, the new UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network should play a key role. The UN SDSN operates under the auspices of the UN Secretary General to mobilise global scientific expertise, especially in universities, research laboratories, and businesses, to support global agenda setting and local problem solving in sustainable development. Hundreds of leaders of sustainable development are already engaged, and more than 100 universities will be formal members of the SDSN by the end of 2013. In addition, the SDSN has created 12 global thematic groups organised around major challenges, including energy, food, biodiversity, health, education, and others. With the mandate of the UNGA, the SDSN could provide the UNGA

with an institutional interface with the global network of universities and research institutions to help ensure that the UNGA and the HLPF have *regular and reliable access to best scientific and technical information*. The SDSN, moreover, offers the organisational means for the global scientific community to organise itself to provide such inputs, without the need for formal top-down intergovernmental control.

The SDG agenda should also be incorporated into the work programs of other UN bodies usually considered to be outside of the main mandates of sustainable development.

We also invite UN Member States to consider adopting a Universal Declaration of Sustainable Development, incorporating the SDGs but affirming its centrality by putting the sustainable development agenda on the highest plane of urgency.

The Secretary General and President of the General Assembly will need to be tasked with making the linkages across these institutional boundaries. The most urgent challenges of integrating the security and sustainable development agenda involve the two to three dozen fragile states, where conflict, poverty, human rights violations, and environmental crises are an interconnected daily reality. These entire regions (e.g., the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and the conflict zones of Western and Central Asia), are the key testing ground of a new, more enlightened approach that addresses peace and security issues in part through the lens of sustainable development.

There is also the need to better harmonise the sustainable development agenda with the ongoing work of the treaty secretariats, including UNFCCC, UNCCD, and CBD. Too often the treaty work is highly legalistic, with a tremendous negotiating focus on the allocation of rights and responsibilities across countries but with insufficient attention to practical problem solving. This has been painfully evident, for example, in the implementation of the UNFCCC, where most of the debates have revolved around questions of what is binding, monitorable, and verifiable, rather than around more practical questions of how actually to de-carbonise energy systems. The UN SDG modalities, for example, the annual SDG meetings, should incorporate a more systematic linkage with the treaty secretariats, to harmonise the policy work under the SDGs with the legal-diplomatic work under the treaties.

One of the most important opportunities for the SDGs lies in timely and detailed data. Unlike the MDGs, which have operated within traditional data collection modalities, so that MDG data are often years out of date, the SDG data collection and monitoring can tap into the new methodologies of real-time data collection and monitoring. At a minimum, annual reviews of the SDGs should be based on data collected during the year in review. This will greatly facilitate the feedback from data to action needed to achieve the SDGs.

2.7 *Key Steps Until 2015*

The SDG agenda is a hugely complex and urgent task, and success even in agreeing to the SDGs is not assured. There are many points of view, and a short window until 2015. Therefore, we face the need for important and specific decisions to be taken on a tight timetable. These include:

- Agreement on the overall SDG framework by 2015.
- Agreement on the new role of the HLPF and ECOSOC.
- A seamless handoff from the MDGs to the SDGs by end-2015.
- A global benchmarking of the SDGs to create meaningful baselines.
- Establishment of new institutions, e.g. UNGA standing committees, to oversee the SDG agenda.
- Incorporation of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network into the work program of the UNGA and HLPF in order to connect the UN processes with the global network of universities and research institutions.
- The endorsement of a Universal Declaration for Sustainable Development.

2.8 *Inspiring the Global Public*

When former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan first proposed the Millennium Development Goals to world leaders in the year 2000, he titled his message, “We the Peoples,” the opening words of the UN Charter. The ultimate creators and beneficiaries of the UN are the peoples of the nation states. Sustainable development can be successful only if the global public is behind the concept and the necessary transformations. Most politicians in our era move with public opinion, not necessarily ahead of it.

The SDGs therefore have a special role to play, not only in guiding the work of the global community, but also creating awareness in the global public. The MDGs have played this role, helping to create a new excitement around the collective global effort to end extreme poverty. Because they are simple and clear in content, they have helped the public to understand the multi-dimensional nature of poverty (involving not only income but also education, gender equality, health, food security, infrastructure, and other basic needs) and to become engaged. They have helped to keep governments accountable.

The UN leadership should take on these lessons in designing and implementing the SDGs. Their force, ultimately, will come from public acceptance, and from public recognition of the urgent need to change how we live, work, and use natural resources. It is the global public, ultimately, that must insist that their governments meet the needs of the poorest of the poor and of unborn generations that will face horrendous ecological conditions unless we act now. To accomplish this, the UN Member States should design

the SDGs to be clear, motivational, and broadly understandable. They should feature a continuing broad outreach through the new social media and traditional media outlets to help bring “SDG awareness” to the global public.

The Rio+20 Summit also rightly emphasised the case for massive education in sustainable development. This too is part of the long-term solution. Sustainable development, we have noted, is *a way of looking at the world* as well as a set of norms or objectives. The public, as well as the politicians, will need fresh help and guidance to understand the complex linkages that tie together economic, social, and environmental challenges. Students everywhere should have familiarity with the SDGs and the motivations behind them. The UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network is now preparing to offer free online educational materials at the university level for mass global education and training.

Most importantly, the SDGs must help the world to understand, and feel, the many reasons for optimism. To secure *The Future We Want*, we must urgently achieve the UN we want in the Age of Sustainable Development. The UN remains the greatest hope for humanity in economic and social development, human rights, peace and security, and environmental sustainability. Its institutions require rapid reforms; its Member States require boldness and vision; and its leaders require stamina and deep moral commitment and purpose.

Humanity is awakening to its challenge, late indeed but still not too late. The world can coalesce around a common agenda. The wonders of modern science and technology, the history of positive cooperation with the MDGs and other initiatives, and our generation’s opportunity to forge a shared moral commitment for human betterment, all are reasons to redouble our efforts. Our common fate and our generation’s place in the great moral chain of humanity call us to action.

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ANNEX 1

SDSN LIST OF ILLUSTRATIVE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS) AND TARGETS

The Goals and Targets are for 2030 unless otherwise noted. Targets marked with () need to be specified at country or sub-national level. Each target will require one or more indicators to be developed at a later stage.*

*Preamble*¹

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) build on the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and aim to finish the job of ending extreme poverty in all its forms. The SDGs reaffirm the need to achieve sustainable development by promoting economic development, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and good governance including peace and security. These goals reaffirm human rights and underscore the right to development as central objectives. They are universal and apply to all countries, national and local governments, businesses, and civil society. Sustainable development will require that the goals be pursued in combination, rather than individually or one at a time.

*Goal 1: End Extreme Poverty Including Hunger*²

End extreme poverty in all its forms (MDGs 1-7), including hunger, child stunting, malnutrition, and food insecurity. Support highly vulnerable countries.

- Target 1a. End absolute income poverty (\$1.25 or less per day) and hunger, including achieving food security and appropriate nutrition, and ending child stunting (MDG 1).
- Target 1b. [Other suitably revised targets of MDGs 2-7 included here or below.]
- Target 1c. Provide enhanced support for highly vulnerable states and Least Developed Countries, to address the structural challenges facing those countries, including violence and conflict.*

¹ Preamble based on the 2012 Rio+20 document.

² The term hunger embraces various things, including child stunting, food insecurity and malnutrition. Appropriate indicators will need to be chosen to reflect the full spectrum of what constitutes hunger.

Goal 2: Achieve Development within Planetary Boundaries

All countries have a right to development that respects planetary boundaries, ensures sustainable production and consumption patterns, and helps to stabilise the global population by mid-century.

- Target 2a. Each country reaches at least the next income level as defined by the World Bank.³
- Target 2b. Countries report on their contribution to planetary boundaries⁴ and incorporate them, together with other environmental and social indicators, into expanded GDP measures and national accounts.*
- Target 2c. Rapid voluntary reduction of fertility through the realisation of sexual and reproductive health rights in countries with total fertility rates above [3] children per woman and a continuation of voluntary fertility reductions in countries where total fertility rates are above replacement level.*

Goal 3: Ensure Effective Learning for All Children and Youth for Life and Livelihood

All girls and boys complete affordable and high-quality early childhood development programs, and primary and secondary education to prepare them for the challenges of modern life and decent livelihoods. All youth and adults have access to continuous lifelong learning to acquire functional literacy, numeracy, and skills to earn a living through decent employment or self-employment.

- Target 3a. All girls and boys have equal access to quality early childhood development (ECD) programs.
- Target 3b. All girls and boys receive quality primary and secondary education that focuses on learning outcomes and on reducing the dropout rate to zero.
- Target 3c. Youth unemployment rate is below [10] per cent.

Goal 4: Achieve Gender Equality, Social Inclusion, and Human Rights for All

Ensure gender equality, human rights, the rule of law, and universal access to public services. Reduce relative poverty and other inequalities that

³ e.g., Low-Income Countries become at least Lower-Middle-Income Countries.

⁴ Planetary boundaries define the safe operating space for humanity in the Earth system. They include greenhouse gas emissions; nitrogen and phosphorus loading; ozone depletion; chemical pollution; freshwater use; ocean acidification; land use change; aerosol loading and loss of biodiversity.

cause social exclusion. Prevent and eliminate violence and exploitation, especially for women and children.

- Target 4a. Monitor and end discrimination and inequalities in public service delivery, the rule of law, access to justice, and participation in political and economic life on the basis of gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, national origin, and social or other status.
- Target 4b. Reduce by half the proportion of households with incomes less than half of the national median income (relative poverty).
- Target 4c. Prevent and eliminate violence against individuals, especially women and children.*

Goal 5: Achieve Health and Well-being at all Ages

Achieve universal health coverage at every stage of life, with particular emphasis on primary health services, including reproductive health, to ensure that all people receive quality health services without suffering financial hardship. All countries promote policies to help individuals make healthy and sustainable decisions regarding diet, physical activity, and other individual or social dimensions of health.

- Target 5a. Ensure universal access to primary healthcare that includes sexual and reproductive healthcare, family planning, routine immunisations, and the prevention and treatment of communicable and non-communicable diseases.⁵
- Target 5b. End preventable deaths by reducing child mortality to [20] or fewer deaths per 1,000 births, maternal mortality to [40] or fewer deaths per 100,000 live births, and mortality under 70 years of age from non-communicable diseases by at least 30 per cent compared with the level in 2015.⁶
- Target 5c. Promote healthy diets and physical activity, discourage unhealthy behaviours such as smoking and excessive alcohol intake, and track subjective well-being and social capital.*

Goal 6: Improve Agriculture Systems and Raise Rural Prosperity

Improve farming practices, rural infrastructure, and access to resources for food production to increase the productivity of agriculture, livestock, and

⁵ We recommend that countries retain suitably updated MDG indicators for HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria.

⁶ Countries that have achieved the mortality targets should set more ambitious aggregate targets that are commensurate with their development and ensure that the minimum quantitative targets are achieved for every sub-population.

fisheries, raise smallholder incomes, reduce environmental impacts, promote rural prosperity, and ensure resilience to climate change.

- Target 6a. Ensure sustainable food production systems with high yields and high efficiency of water, soil nutrients, and energy, supporting nutritious diets with low food losses and waste.*
- Target 6b. Halt forest and wetland conversion to agriculture, protect soil resources, and ensure that farming systems are resilient to climate change and disasters.*
- Target 6c. Ensure universal access in rural areas to basic resources and infrastructure services (land, water, sanitation, modern energy, transport, mobile and broadband communication, agricultural inputs, and advisory services).

Goal 7: Empower Inclusive, Productive, and Resilient Cities

Make all cities socially inclusive, economically productive, environmentally sustainable, secure, and resilient to climate change and other risks. Develop participatory, accountable, and effective city governance to support rapid and equitable urban transformation.

- Target 7a. End extreme urban poverty, expand employment and productivity, and raise living standards, especially in slums.*
- Target 7b. Ensure universal access to a secure and affordable built environment and basic urban services including housing; water, sanitation and waste management; low-carbon energy and transport; and mobile and broadband communication.
- Target 7c. Ensure safe air and water quality for all, and integrate reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, efficient land and resource use, and climate and disaster resilience into investments and standards.*

Goal 8: Curb Human-Induced Climate Change and Ensure Sustainable Energy

Curb greenhouse gas emissions from energy, industry, agriculture, the built environment, and land-use change to ensure a peak of global CO₂ emissions by 2020 and to head off the rapidly growing dangers of climate change.⁷ Promote sustainable energy for all.

⁷ The Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC (2007) has defined this level as global average temperatures that are 2°C above the pre-industrial level. Recent scientific evidence suggests the need to reduce the long-term temperature increase to 1.5°C or less. The global emission reduction target should be regularly updated in view of the growing body of scientific evidence.

- Target 8a. Decarbonise the energy system, ensure clean energy for all, and improve energy efficiency, with targets for 2020, 2030, and 2050.*
- Target 8b. Reduce non-energy-related emissions of greenhouse gases through improved practices in agriculture, forestry, waste management, and industry.*
- Target 8c. Adopt incentives, including pricing greenhouse gas emissions, to curb climate change and promote technology transfer to developing countries.*

Goal 9: Secure Ecosystem Services and Biodiversity, and Ensure Good Management of Water and Other Natural Resources

Biodiversity, marine and terrestrial ecosystems of local, regional, and global significance are inventoried, managed, and monitored to ensure the continuation of resilient and adaptive life support systems and to support sustainable development.⁸ Water and other natural resources are managed sustainably and transparently to support inclusive economic and human development.

- Target 9a. Ensure resilient and productive ecosystems by adopting policies and legislation that address drivers of ecosystem degradation, and requiring individuals, businesses and governments to pay the social cost of pollution and use of environmental services.*
- Target 9b. Participate in and support regional and global arrangements to inventory, monitor, and protect biomes and environmental commons of regional and global significance and curb trans-boundary environmental harms, with robust systems in place no later than 2020.
- Target 9c. All governments and businesses commit to the sustainable, integrated, and transparent management of water, agricultural land, forests, fisheries, mining, and hydrocarbon resources to support inclusive economic development and the achievement of all SDGs.*

Goal 10: Transform Governance for Sustainable Development

The public sector, business, and other stakeholders commit to good governance, including transparency, accountability, access to information, participation, an end to tax and secrecy havens, and efforts to stamp out corruption. The international rules governing international finance, trade, corporate reporting, technology, and intellectual property are made consistent

⁸ In line with the Aichi Biodiversity targets to be achieved by 2020.

with achieving the SDGs. The financing of poverty reduction and global public goods including efforts to head off climate change are strengthened and based on a graduated set of global rights and responsibilities.

- Target 10a. Governments (national and local) and business commit to the SDGs, transparent monitoring, and annual reports – including independent evaluation of integrated reporting for all major companies starting no later than 2020.*
- Target 10b. Adequate domestic and international public finance for ending extreme poverty, providing global public goods, capacity building, and transferring technologies, including 0.7 per cent of GNI in ODA for all high-income countries, and an additional \$100 billion per year in official climate financing by 2020.
- Target 10c. Rules for international trade, finance, taxation, business accounting, and intellectual property are reformed to be consistent with and support achieving the SDGs.