

Retreat on “SDGs, Rio+20 and the Post-2015 Development Agenda”
Tarrytown House Conference Center
Tarrytown, NY 22-24 January 2012

Discussion Note 1¹

Informal consultations on the proposal for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the context of Rio+20 and the post-2015 development agenda were held in Tarrytown, NY from 23 to 24 January 2012, with the participation of 44 countries, representatives of NGOs, and representatives of the UN and UN agencies. This is the first of three background discussion notes prepared for the Retreat by the World Resources Institute.

Linking SDGs, MDGs and the post-2015 Development Agenda

“Let us develop a new generation of sustainable development goals to pick up where the MDGs leave off. Let us agree on the means to achieve them.”²

– UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

“This is not a Conference only on Environment, but on Sustainable Development.”

– Presentation on Rio+20 by Ambassador Andre Lago, Brazil

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been proposed as a potential outcome of Rio+20, and are garnering growing support as a practical means for implementing a Rio+20 sustainable development agenda.³ For more than a decade, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have been the dominant development paradigm and organizing framework for development cooperation, but are set to expire in 2015. With the process for defining a post-2015 development agenda getting underway, a Rio+20 outcome on SDGs could play a timely and catalytic role in framing and advancing the post-2015 dialogue.

SDGs and MDGs

A key concern surrounding the proposal for SDGs is the relationship to the current MDGs. In September 2010, a High Level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly agreed on an action plan to accelerate progress towards achieving the MDGs by 2015. Informal consultations on the SDG proposal put forward by the governments of Colombia, Guatemala and Peru have strongly affirmed the guiding principle that the formulation of SDGs should not divert or in any way undermine the focus of the international community on achieving the MDGs by 2015.⁴ Further, assessments of the strengths and limitations of the MDG framework and implementation experience provide important lessons on how SDGs can spur renewed commitment to sustainable development at the national level, help shape priorities for development investment and aid, and galvanize international cooperation and coordinated action.⁵

SDGs and the post-2015 Development Agenda

The SDG proposal and informal consultations to date, the report of the UN Secretary-General’s Global Sustainability Panel and other Rio+20 inputs consistently point to the importance of ensuring that the development of SDGs is integrally linked to and helps frame the post-2015 development agenda process—and avoids a Rio+20 outcome that would establish a second parallel process.⁶

The UN General Assembly has mandated work on a post-2015 development agenda and initial efforts are getting underway that provide an entry point for linking SDGs, Rio+20 and the post-2015 process:

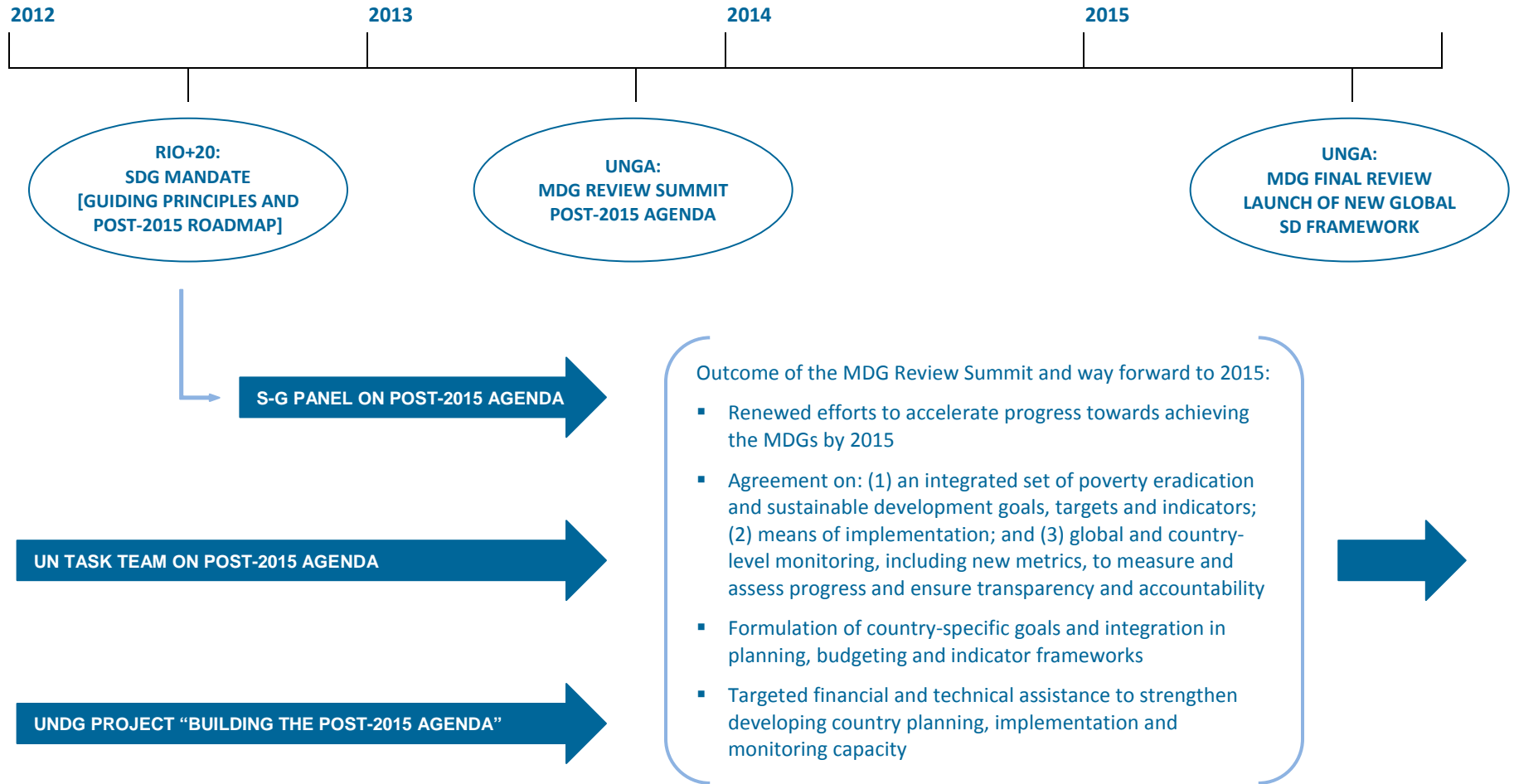
- The UN Secretary-General has established a UN Task Team, co-chaired by UNDP and UNDESA, to advance work on the definition of a post-2015 UN Development Agenda. One of the first activities of the task team is to propose a roadmap for the post-2015 agenda process that is expected to be delivered to the Secretary-General by Rio+20.
- Following Rio+20, the Secretary-General has announced plans to convene a high level/expert panel to advise and help guide work on the post-2015 agenda. The panel is expected to present its report and recommendations to the Secretary-General by mid-2013, which in turn will inform the UN General Assembly 'MDG Special Event' to be held in the fall of 2013.
- To support the work of the UN Task Team and to help facilitate country-level engagement in the post-2015 agenda process, a project has been initiated through the UN Development Group MDG Task Force on "Building the Post-2015 Development Agenda" with five core outputs identified: (i) supporting national and local consultation processes; (ii) convening global and regional meetings on the post-2015 development agenda; (iii) engaging in discussions and dialogues with partners; (iv) producing discussion and position papers on the post-2015 development agenda; and (v) taking advantage of the opportunities provided by global social networks and mobile technologies.

The Catalytic Role of Rio+20

A Rio+20 outcome on SDGs could play a catalytic role in framing and advancing work on the post-2015 development agenda. This could be in the form of a *Rio Mandate on SDGs and the Post-2015 Development Agenda*. A possible scenario for achieving convergence between a Rio+20 outcome on SDGs and the post-2015 agenda process could be the following (as illustrated in Figure 1):

- **Pre-Rio+20:** As part of the Rio+20 preparatory process, create space for continued informal dialogue aimed at forging agreement on the form and content of a Rio+20 outcome on SDGs in the context of the post-2015 agenda process.
- **At Rio+20:** Ensure that SDGs are a core component of the Rio+20 outcome document *The Future We Want*, in the form of a *Rio Mandate on SDGs and the Post-2015 Development Agenda*. The main elements of the Rio Mandate could include: (i) a longer-term vision on the role of SDGs in achieving sustainable development and poverty eradication; (ii) guiding principles for the formulation of sustainable development goals, targets and indicators; and (iii) a post-Rio+20 roadmap for the further development of SDGs in the context of the post-2015 development agenda process.
- **Post-Rio+20:** Establish and launch an inclusive and evidence-based process to implement the Rio Mandate on SDGs, with the aim of presenting a post-2015 framework of sustainable development goals, targets and indicators to the UNGA MDG Review Summit in the fall of 2013.

Figure 1. SDGs, Rio+20 and the Post-2015 Development Agenda: A Possible Scenario



Endnotes

¹ Revised 24 February 2012. This discussion note was prepared by Peter Hazlewood at World Resources Institute. The views and opinions expressed are not necessarily those held by WRI. For more information on this Discussion Note or WRI's work on Green Economy please contact Peter Hazlewood (peter.hazlewood@wri.org) or Erin Gray (erin.gray@wri.org).

² The Secretary-General's Report to the General Assembly – "We the Peoples." Speech as delivered, New York, 21 September 2011.

³ SDGs in the context of Rio+20 were initially proposed by the Governments of Colombia, Guatemala and Peru – see Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Republica de Colombia. 2011. Rio+20: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). An Updated Proposal from the Governments of Colombia, Guatemala and Peru. SDGs also are proposed in the Declaration of the 64th Annual UN DPI/NGO Conference on "Sustainable Societies, Responsive Citizens," 2011. A number of Member States and other stakeholders have supported the development of SDGs in their submissions for the Rio+20 compilation text, available at <http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/index.php?menu=115>. SDGs are proposed in the 'Zero Draft' of the Rio+20 Outcome Document (paras. 105-110) – see United Nations. 2012. "The Future We Want."

⁴ "Insights from the Informal Consultations on the SDG Proposal," Bogota, Colombia, 4-5 November 2011.

⁵ For example: United Nations Development Programme. 2010. What Will It Take to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals? – An International Assessment.

⁶ United Nations General Assembly. 2011. Accelerating Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals: options for sustained and inclusive growth and issues for advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015. Annual report of the Secretary-General A/66/126.