



Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue on the Post-2015 Development Agenda

The Geneva Perspective, Phase Two

hosted by

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1. Introduction

The Geneva Social Observatory convened a roundtable on 11 June 2014 to take advantage of the latest OWG document for the purpose of identifying possible linkages among the proposed goals and targets from a Geneva perspective. This was the second such recent exercise, building on a panel discussion and an open interactive dialogue on 24 April 2014. Key messages from that dialogue supported the momentum in sustainable development policy towards inclusiveness and universality and new ways of thinking about what sustainability means - attentiveness to trade as a key enabler, but also new thinking about consumption as well as production, over-nutrition as well as under-nutrition, sustainable livelihoods through entrepreneurship, and health for all rather than disease-specific initiatives. Participants observed the increasing presence of non-state actors in global policy debates and called for new mechanisms and trust-building for multi-stakeholder engagement and partnerships.

At the 11 June event, participants were invited to reflect on how the OWG “zero draft” had evolved and where a Geneva-based dialogue might create further linkages among the goals and targets. The GSO event was facilitated by lead discussants who stimulated lively discussions on cross-cutting linkages from an employment perspective (Constance Thomas, former ILO Director of the International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour), from a trade perspective (Alice Tipping, leading the Environment and Natural Resources program at ICTSD), a food security perspective (Cécile Molinier, former Geneva head of UNDP) and, finally, a health perspective (Katherine Hagen, Executive Director of the GSO).

Participants were reminded that the SDG process is building on the success of the Millennium Development Goals, but it is not clear yet what the SDGs should actually do. From one perspective, the SDGs are an updated articulation of good development as we understand it in the world today. A second perspective, however, is that they should serve as a global agenda for the international community and member states to implement by working together for the welfare of all. A third perspective is that they are a binding set of commitments for the world to avoid “heading over the cliff”, as one participant described it. One may worry that the goals will prove to be too aspirational and high reaching and that no one will be able to do anything with them.

Participants agreed that the SDGs need to be realistic and based on changes that can be achieved in the current system. The process will be difficult to move from the aspirational to the pragmatic, but there are some hopeful signs. One is that the targets for action are being seen as responsibilities that go in both directions from developed countries and from developing countries. Another encouraging development is the approach being taken to the means of implementation, a late addition to the SDGs but one that is being taken very seriously, to link accountability to building the capacity to deliver on the commitments.



What follows is a summation of the pragmatism displayed by participants in this roundtable over the ways to connect the goals and targets to realistic but comprehensive priorities for global collaboration – essentially following the second perspective that the SDGs need to look beyond the concept of “good development” to focus on an agenda for the international community at large. The world is no longer a simple dichotomy between developed and developing countries but rather a global continuum with domestic inequities and challenges that are increasingly commonly shared.

2. Linkages among Goals and Targets

a. The Employment Perspective

Starting with the employment perspective, participants were reminded that the ILO was just completing its annual Conference with significant contributions on employment policy, with insights on job-led development, and transitioning from the informal to the formal economy. Participants noted that the zero draft could benefit from these ILO-specific insights, as well more specific linkages among the goals and targets to rural development and agriculture but also to under-served populations generally, in both urban and rural settings everywhere. More could be done to tie sustainable jobs to the health sector and to the growth in green jobs, and to education, employability and lifelong learning – and above all, to an emphasis on quality of sustainable livelihoods across all of the OWG goals. Specific targets on youth and gender equality also need to be linked to both education and economic growth more directly. Addressing the digital divide brings in the importance of technological growth and innovation for sustainable livelihoods.

b. The Trade Perspective

Trade was seen as the engine for economic growth, associated with many trade-specific targets (e.g. duty-free, quota-free access for least developed countries) but also 40 or 50 elements with indirect trade implications among the targets – fossil fuel subsidies in the energy goal, fisheries reform, controlling agricultural commodity price volatility, improving access to medicines, better water resource management, or ending the trafficking in endangered species, just to name a few. The value-added approach was especially well suited to measure the impact of trade in these other goals. Trade should also be defined as an enabler for such goals as better health, adaptation and mitigation of climate change, or innovation in services. Participants furthermore observed that trade can be linked to the enabling role of information and communications technologies, which led participants to the general observation that the role of trade in services should be added to the OWG lexicon to complement the understanding about the benefits and importance of supporting trade in agriculture and industrial goods. Participants observed, furthermore, that measures should be incorporated into the zero draft for reducing the costs of trade as well as ensuring equitable trade.

c. The Food Security Perspective

In the discussion on food security, participants suggested that more attention needs to be directed in the goal dealing with increasing agricultural productivity overall as well as connecting agricultural production to environmental balance generally, not just for the sake of agricultural biodiversity or for resilience and adaptation by small-scale farmers. Water usage is another very important element in agriculture, and

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strong links should be established between the food security goal and the water and sanitation goal. The changing agricultural mix of exports versus locally produced foods is also pertinent in the new development paradigm – which links food security to trade but also to sustainable consumption and production patterns. In fact, this works both ways: the new thinking on promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns should be more fully integrated with linkages to food security, and to concerns about both under-nutrition and over-nutrition and healthy lifestyles. Returning to the first topic, the focus on the issues of food security, nutrition and agriculture should also extend to rural development, employment and sustainable livelihoods as a broader goal, along with linkages to gender equality and maternal health.

d. The Health Perspective

Taking the discussion to the matter of attaining a healthy life for all at all ages, the participants appreciated the commitment expressed in the resolution adopted by the World Health Assembly on 24 May 2014 to “include health-related indicators for measuring progress in all relevant dimensions of sustainable development”. The WHA resolution also refers to the social, environmental and economic determinants of health that reach beyond the scope of a narrowly defined view of health. Participants in the GSO dialogue supported the importance of a dynamic multi-sectoral approach to the goal of attaining a healthy life for all and conversely to articulating the links of healthy living to the benefit of these other goals. These are tasks that remain to be done in the OWG process. Poverty eradication depends on more from a health goal than merely ensuring coverage of the poor, the marginalized and the vulnerable in social protection measures. It depends, said the participants, on genuine capacity for healthy living. Another important feature of the WHA resolution is its emphasis on accountability and measuring progress through better data to monitor health equity.

On the other hand, the zero draft contains other provisions on access to medicines, vaccines and medical technologies and on sexual and reproductive health for all and even on indoor and outdoor air pollution that do not appear in the WHA resolution. The dynamics of consensus building at the WHO may have blocked the readiness of some Member States to include the access or reproductive health issues, while the air pollution issue is merely one new focus of health and its links to climate change that has in fact been embraced by the WHO Executive Board. Others would suggest that the phenomenon of anti-microbial resistance or concerns about global health security should be brought in as priority concerns. Participants recognized that the multiplicity of global non-state actors in health is striking even as the WHO continues to grapple with determining how to work with them.

3. A Multi-Stakeholder International Community with a Human Rights Approach

In conclusion, the GSO roundtable fits into a Geneva space that was defined by many participants as far more multi-stakeholder than what one finds at the UN General Assembly in New York. Geneva-based UN agencies and other international organizations here have been more involved in technical capacity building - with a policy focus, to be sure, but less driven by the political dynamics of the UN that dominate the intergovernmental deliberations in New York. A strong and growing concentration of non-state actors in the midst of the multiplicity of international organizations in the Geneva international scene may become an expanding opportunity for implementation and accountability by non-state actors and multi-



stakeholder partnerships. More thought should be directed to the opportunities for multi-stakeholder coalitions here, such as the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement, and on how to manage both trust-building and accountability.

Finally, Geneva also offers linkages to a human rights-based approach to the Post-2015 Development Agenda, drawing on the network of state and non-state actors around the Human Rights Council. While there is no specific goal proposed on human rights in the zero draft, there is an integrating focus on universality, addressing inequality, and accommodating the needs of specific disadvantaged groups. The general consensus among stakeholders in Geneva is that a human rights approach needs to be integrated into all sectors of sustainable development to highlight the importance of “freedom from want” and “freedom from fear”. The human rights treaties encompass both the rights to food security, health, water, education and the rights to peaceful societies, personal security, and the fair administration of justice. Inclusiveness and equality, including but not limited to gender equality are part of this mainstreaming approach. Enhancing accountability in the post-2015 Development Agenda can also benefit from adapting the success of the Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review mechanism as well as the role of non-state actors in that process.