Comments from Experts on the Key Messages from RIO+ Centre’s Online Consultation on the SDGs (Aug – Sept 2014)

The RIO+ Centre organized an online consultation between August 25th and September 5th on the outcome document of the United Nation’s Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The key messages extracted from the inputs received from the participants (members of academia, civil society, and private sector) were sent to Brazilian and international experts for comments.

To ensure the quality of the comments, the RIO+ Centre looked for persons involved in and committed to Sustainable Development and aware of the subject area of the respective message. Among the eligible to reply the Centre has chosen:

- Izabella Teixeira – Minister of Environment of Brazil, member of the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda and one of the Brazilian negotiators during the Rio +20.
- Prof. Suzana Kahn – Rio’s Federal University Green Fund Coordinator; president of the Scientific Committee of the Brazilian Panel on Climate Change; and vice-president of the IPCC’s Working Group III.
- Artur Cardoso Lacerda – interim vice-secretary for Finance and Economic Institutions and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Finance of Brazil; and Brazilian representative in several international financing related negotiations.
- Dr. Márcia Muchagata – Advisor at the Minister’s office – Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger (MDS) – represented the MDS in the National Commission for the Rio+20 Conference’s executive secretariat.
- Dr. Kishan Khoday - UNDP Team Leader for Climate Change, DRR and Resilience in the Arab Region, has led UNDP country cooperation on sustainable development in major economies in the South including in China, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia.
Dr. Samuel G. Doe - Policy Advisor & Team Leader in the Policy & Planning Division at UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention & Recovery in New York.

Dr. Rafael Osório – Researcher at the Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA); at the Secretary for Strategic Studies (SAE); and at the UNDP's International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG). He is a specialist in social mobility, poverty and inequality.

Layla Saad – Deputy Director at the World Centre for Sustainable Development, led the Advocacy and Partnerships work of the MDG Achievement Fund.

You will find below their comments on respective messages.

MESSAGE:

*Climate Change deserves more emphasis in the text, via more immediate and tangible proposals, and increased interrelationship with other objectives. Aspects such as durability and eco-efficiency, which are important for sustainability, are not considered in the text.*

“I agree that in a Sustainable Development discussion Climate Change is an imperative issue, especially because climate is not limited to nature, ecology or finite natural resources, it involves economic matters such as mitigation/adaptation costs and natural resources sharing. Even if, hypothetically, we could regenerate the environment, adapt to it or remove CO2 from the atmosphere, or even to adopt geoengineering measures, what would be the economic impact? What would happen to the poorest regions or to the most vulnerable population? Increasing the existing inequalities, besides being humanly unfair, is dangerous. Living in a world under extreme tension is a risk. Therefore, all measures, be them technologic, behavioural, political, institutional, immediate or not, but that aim at a more rational and efficient use of our resources, must be highlighted, because all of them will be necessary to achieve sustainable development.”

Suzana Kahn

Suzana Kahn is Rio de Janeiro’s Federal University Green Fund Coordinator; president of the Scientific Committee of the Brazilian Panel on Climate Change; and vice-president of the IPCC’s Working Group III.
MESSAGE:

The use of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a metric for measuring development is not satisfactory. Furthermore, GDP does not measure the quality of growth.

“GDP still is one of the most used references to assess development. However, it is important to notice that this indicator presents limitations, since it does not integrate properly social and environmental aspects to economic values. This might lead to limited perceptions regarding countries’ development. The adoption of new approaches to assess progress, which reflect environmental, social and economic aspects of development, via tangible indicators, has the potential of inducing global development with increased balance between the three sustainable development dimensions. The establishment of a multilateral process to discuss new ways to assess progress, considering the latest developments in a broader way, is welcome. Thus, it is noteworthy the work done by the UN Statistical Commission, the suitable forum for reflections of such nature.”

Artur Cardoso de Lacerda

Artur Cardoso de Lacerda is the Interim vice-secretary for Finance and Economic Institutions and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Finance of Brazil; and a Public Policy Specialist.

MENSAGEM:

The lack of clear definitions impairs understanding of the goals. Extreme poverty, for example, is a term that needs to be revised in order to be adapted to international particularities.

“The next step in the SDG creation agenda is the definition of indicators and targets, in which should be clearly determined, exactly, what must be achieved in each of the already defined goals. For this stage it will be necessary to keep the mobilization and efforts for the chosen indicators to be clear, feasible and easily measurable for any country. Even though some objectives, indeed, lack a clearer definition, this is not so
in the case of poverty.

The concept of poverty has been subject of a broad debate at the international community. Its definition implies difficult choices about which deprivations define what poverty is – income, food, education, health, etc. and which are the minimum acceptable standards for each one of these dimensions. Amidst a plurality of approaches, income deprivation has been the most adopted. For the MDGs the poverty line was set at US$1.25 purchasing power parity (PPP), which is likely to be kept as the main criterion for the SDG #1. This line, such as any other that might be adopted, will always be prone to criticism due to the myriad of living standards around the world.

It is noteworthy that, as a group, the SDG deal with poverty in almost all of the goals, including those that deal with environmental issues. Hence, even if not laid up in an explicit way, the goals deal with poverty in a multidimensional way.”

Márcia Muchagata
Marcia Muchagata is an Advisor at the Minister’s office – Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger (MSD), and a Public Policy Specialist.

MESSAGE:

*It is important to establish a trustworthy and regularly updated database on the topics involved, providing disaggregated data.*

“Monitoring and analysis of indicators and trends will be key to success of the new post-2015 and SDG frameworks. Combatting inequality is at the core of the new global development compact, and a vital task will therefore be to elaborate indicators and measurements that track progress beyond composite indices. This includes analyzing future trends and scenarios for income inequality, gender inequality and social exclusion. Data and indicators on inter-group inequality, disadvantaged groups and inequality of opportunities are specific areas where challenges exist, and where new partnerships
between the UN, Government and civil society could bring tangible results.”

Kishan Khoday

UNDP Team Leader for Climate Change,
DRR and Resilience in the Arab Region

MESSAGE:

Drugs (and trafficking); health; transportation; food security; diverse forms of violence; and humanitarian situations have not been tackled adequately in the text. The promotion of peace and stability is fundamental for fighting poverty.

“Overall as a political process here in New York we are all thrilled at the result achieved so far with the zero draft and the growing consensus around it. It did not come easy. It was painstaking work done behind the scene to get to where we have come. I like very much your key messages although many of them will be addressed once the means of implementation part of the document is clearly fleshed out and this is still work in progress. So I think your views will add to the urgency to get that done.

On violence and peace and peace and stability, we are of the view that the 12 targets of the OWG Goal 16 address the key issues and drivers of conflict as we anticipated. We particularly welcome the fact that the goal contains both targets on the incidence of violence (e.g. 16.1 and 16.2) and targets that address the drivers of conflict (for example on participatory and responsive decision-making, accountability, the rule of law, justice, corruption and political and civil freedoms). These are central to promoting a positive and sustainable peace which enables sustainable development over the long run. It is also welcome that the systemic and global-level factors that drive conflict – including flows of arms and illicit finance – are addressed. One area still missing however but which we believe could be captured in the development of indicators includes a focus on social cohesion and resolution of conflicts.

The relationship between natural resources, conflict, violence, and disasters is
particularly important. At least 40% of internal conflicts over the last sixty years have a link to natural resources, and the risks of conflict relapse are elevated when the exploitation of natural resources cause environmental damage or when their benefits are unequally distributed. Sustainable management of natural resources is critical, both on a national level to support economic growth and job creation, as well as on a local level to support the livelihoods of conflict-affected and vulnerable people. When managed sustainably, transparently and equitably, and when the injustices of resource control are addressed, natural resources can act not only as an engine of economic well-being, but also as a platform to pursue sustainable peace. We think this link is not as explicit in the document. We are however heartened by the emphasis on resilience across the document. Over eight goals speak to resilience (albeit on disaster) but this can be expanded to account for the nexus across these shocks. It can also be more explicit through the indicators framework.”

**Samuel G. Doe**

Samuel Doe is the Policy Advisor & Team Leader in the Policy & Planning Division at UNDP’s Bureau for Crisis Prevention & Recovery in New York.

**MESSAGE:**

_The use of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a metric for measuring development is not satisfactory. Furthermore, GDP does not measure the quality of growth._

“There is a lot to be discussed about development, however, there is no doubt that increasing the size of a country’s production output, what the GDP measures, is not among its purposes. Economic growth during the development process is desirable, but as a mean to validate the only goal that might justify it, to guarantee that, regardless of who they are and where they live, people will be able to live long, with health, free of deprivations, and free of physical and symbolic violence that might restrain their ability of living their lives as they please.

Nevertheless, not all the economic growth modalities are equally desirable to achieve
such goal. As a matter of fact, there are economic growth processes that might impair instead of contributing to development, such as those based on the irrational exploitation of human and natural resources, damaging its availability for future generations. The GDP, unfortunately, measures only production, and does not tell us anything about the quality or the sustainability of the development. Such development aspects are way too complex to be squeezed in the GDP, or any other single statistic, in which, purposely, one might want to attribute the function of measuring it.”

**Rafael Osório**

Rafael Osório is a Researcher at the Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA); at the Secretary for Strategic Studies (SAE); and at the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG/UNDP).

**MESSAGE:**

*The SDG should include an institutional dimension (either transversal or parallel to the three existing dimensions).*

“There is no doubt that sustainable development in general and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in particular would benefit from having an institutional dimension which could provide the impetus for changing how we implement an agenda that intends to make a marked shift away from business as usual in order to achieve a world of greater justice, equity and inclusion. The very nature of the SDGs in their attempt to answer the call to action for integrated and equitable social, economic and environmental development that emerged from the Rio+20 Conference, points to the need for a new process of policy formulation that are cognizant of and responsive to the need to go beyond traditional sectorial policy making to processes that are cross sectorial and promote policy coherence. This will require shifts in how government institutions operate and relate to one another in the pursuit of national agendas.

But beyond coherent policy making for integrated development, there are several key aspects of an institutional dimension of SDGs and these are inextricably linked
to issues of governance which were clearly absent from the outgoing MDG agenda. Accountability, often one of the main stumbling blocks to the effective implementation of international commitments at the national and subnational level, is a clear example of governance mechanisms that should be part of an SDG agenda. For accountability on government commitments both past and present citizens and their organizations need access to information, greater transparency and openness of government policy, practice, statistics and budgets, effective channels of participation and redress, access to justice and rule of law amongst others. The ‘My World’ consultation on ‘The World We Want’ put an honest and responsive government amongst the 5 million participants top priorities. Greater attention should be given to integrating institutional and governance dimensions across all the SDGs both as they relate to international dynamics between countries as well as with society and state at the national and sub-national level. This is a key area for action for civil society to push for.”

Layla Saad

Layla Saad is the Deputy Director at the World Centre for Sustainable Development (RIO+ Centre).

MESSAGE:

Sustained Economic Development is a controversial topic and it includes incongruities (e.g. the clash between the current model of growth versus sustainability, inclusion, and equity). It should be interconnected with other objectives (e.g.: fighting hunger should be connected with waste reduction). Would Sustainable Economic Development not be a more appropriate construction?

“Both concepts presented for comments, sustainable and sustained, are not synonyms, but are easily recognized as interdependent. On one hand the expression sustainable adds the environmental and social dimensions to the economic dimension; on the other hand the expression sustained contains the idea that it is necessary to guarantee that the development will happen in solid cycles. Economic growth cycles abruptly interrupted by systemic crisis have substantial negative impacts on vulnerable
populations, which might erode the gains obtained from the three sustainable development dimensions. The guarantee of a sustained economic development, therefore, is a required condition for achieving the sustainable development model that we look for.

The outcome document presented by the Open Working Group has captured, in a positive way, the relationship between sustained economic development and sustainable development, which can be verified, for example, in the wordings of Objective #8: “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.”

Artur Cardoso de Lacerda
Artur Cardoso de Lacerda is the Interim vice-secretary for Finance and Economic Institutions and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Finance of Brazil; and a Public Policy Specialist.

MESSAGE:
“Means of Implementation” are relevant for civil society. Accountability, general participation, and interrelationship with different spheres of influence (geographical, political, social, demographic, and productive) are important. National and subnational legal frameworks are necessary and should include aspects that allow participation among public, private, and non-governmental actors – emphasizing local actions.

“Some of the MDGs’ assessment reviews point that the absence of specific goals related to means of implementation prevented more significant achievements, especially in relation to financing for development. As an attempt to overcome such shortcomings the proposal by the Open Working Group established, under the SDG 17, a set of actions related to fostering the means of implementation, dealing not only with financing, but also with technology, capacity building, and multisectorial partnerships.

The Rio +20 Conference’s outcome document deals with participation issues, either in international, regional or local fora, in an assertive way. However, the proposals presented for the SDG are not that firm and there is no indication of actions/objectives related
to Civil Society empowerment in the policy implementation definition for sustainable development. This is an important gap, which reflects the difficulties, faced either by countries or by the UN system, to include such participation. Fortunately, in Brazil, participation practices are well known and used, which can be exemplified with the existence of several public policy councils and the national conferences. More recently, we have created a Policy of Social Participation that fosters society’s participation arenas and the Civil Society – State dialogue mechanisms.”

Márcia Muchagata
Marcia Muchagata is an Advisor at the Minister’s office – Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger (MSD), and a Public Policy Specialist.

The World Centre for Sustainable Development (RIO+ Centre)
One of the most important legacies of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) was the launching, during its High-Level Segment, of the “World Centre for Sustainable Development - RIO+ Centre”. Established on 24 June 2013, the RIO+ Centre works to reaffirm and make actionable the inextricable link between social, economic and environmental policies for the achievement of sustainable development and human well-being.