

The SDGs in the Asia-Pacific

a shared agenda for action



Source: www.globalopportunitynetwork.org

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Forum Report

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About the forum

With a focus on opportunities and challenges for cross-sector collaboration, *The SDGs in the Asia-Pacific: a shared agenda for action* was a one-day interactive forum held on 2 June 2016 in Sydney. The event was co-organised by the University of Technology Sydney, University of New South Wales, University of Sydney, Sustainable Development Solutions Network Australia/Pacific (SDSN Aus/Pac) and Research for Development Impact (RDI) Network.

The forum was conceived and developed in response to a recognised need to build linkages and share information between Sydney-based international development practitioners and researchers seeking to influence and inform the uptake of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Asia-Pacific region.

The specific objectives of the forum were to:

1. Coordinate expertise and promote discussion and action on critiques, concerns and issues to monitor in relation to the SDGs
2. Assert the interest and concern of the Sydney development community in the SDGs in the Asia-Pacific region
3. Connect Sydney-based researchers and practitioners and foster opportunities for future collaboration

Recognising that the SDGs agenda offers a unique universal framework for sustainable development, different actors in Australia and throughout the Asia-Pacific region are currently determining what it might mean for them to engage with this agenda in different ways. Worldwide, the uptake of the SDGs agenda is uneven and there are significant challenges related to its interpretation, implementation and monitoring in vastly different contexts.

Within the Asia-Pacific region, the SDGs offer a powerful development narrative and roadmap. However, without the institutional and technical support from civil society actors, governments, the private sector, international donors and other stakeholders, there is a real risk that their potential to contribute to human development and a sustainable future of the planet will not be achieved.

The SDGs in the Asia-Pacific aimed to highlight the need for cross-sector and interdisciplinary approaches to the SDGs if these challenges are to be addressed and the SDGs are to be achieved in the Asia-Pacific region. Rather than focusing on technical solutions and sector-based issues - topics already being addressed by other platforms - this forum focussed on the process and potential of partnerships and sought to identify opportunities for researchers and practitioners to work together to address gaps and add value in the implementation of the SDGs.

The organising committee of the forum targeted invitations in order to ensure a balanced representation of researchers, practitioners and policymakers. With approximately 70 participants attending the day, there was a valuable balance of input and participation from the spheres of academia and practice, as well as policy. The forum was designed to encourage actors who may not otherwise interact to share about their work and engage in meaningful discussions.

The structure of the day was guided by an underlying steer towards identifying cross-sector actions and opportunities towards advancing the SDGs agenda in the region. The topic was introduced by two keynote addresses representing Asia (Dr Yanuar Nugroho, Executive Office of the President of Indonesia) and the Pacific (Patricia Sachs-Cornish, Pacific Community). Using this groundwork, the remainder of the day was dedicated to breakout group discussions focussed on different thematic areas and their particular relation to the two geographic regions of Asia and the Pacific. These discussions returned key insights to the plenary and welcomed response and calls for action.

This report captures the key points from each session of the forum. It incorporates the background guidance information used to frame group discussion, as well as highlighting discussion outcomes, related to each of the five thematic areas:

- Integration within the SDGs framework
- Monitoring and the SDGs
- Pathways and prioritisation for development
- Addressing global inequality
- Aid and development in a globalised world

The report concludes by highlighting the key calls to action which will be considered and carried forward by the organising committee and their respective institutions and organisations in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

For a summarised version of this report, go here: <http://ap-unsdsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/19912-ISF-SDG-4pp-brochure-web.pdf>.

Keynote session:

Patricia Sachs-Cornish, Pacific Community

The Pacific have already embarked on a process to address the SDGs in their unique context

The Pacific as a region has a unique set of challenges related to geography, demography, vulnerability and politics which result in significant challenges to progressing the SDGs without account for the complex realities of the diverse countries which belong to it.

After experiencing a lack of consultation and delayed commitment to the MDGs agenda, the Pacific has successfully taken on learnings from this previous agenda and is already proactively engaging with the new development agenda through a range of regional cooperation mechanisms.

A lack of organised data and limited human and institutional capacity continue to pose challenges, however political buy-in has been established and the Pacific Community is committed to assisting its member nations to prioritise the SDGs appropriately and integrate the international framework into national action plans. The Pacific SDGs Taskforce has been created to support regional, sub-regional and national implementation plans.

Moving from silos to multidisciplinary approaches

Using SDG 17 as the basis for means of implementation, the Pacific Community is committed to encouraging all stakeholders to re-think their siloed approaches and engage in multidisciplinary, cross-sectoral action.

The development community (including academics and practitioners) needs to take a lead role in supporting this endeavour by identifying and supporting partnerships as well as recognising the interlinkages between the SDGs themselves.

Given the unique challenges faced in the Pacific and recognising the urgency of the SDGs agenda in light of increasing impacts of climate change, meaningful collaboration will be absolutely essential for the SDGs to be achieved. Recognising the changes which the SDGs have brought to the international aid landscape, international partners should consider how their work can synchronise with regional and national processes and strategies.

Keynote session:

Dr Yanuar Nugroho, Executive Office of the President of Indonesia

The link between the SDGs and development

The SDGs are the product of an inherently political process. Nevertheless, they remain a powerful, universal framework which ultimately seeks to achieve positive human development and uphold the underlying spirit of 'leaving no one behind'.

Using an understanding of development which reflects "raising capacity of people" and building resilience for "dealing with uncertainties", at the community level this provides a human lens which will see the SDGs framework have real impact in people's lives.

The importance of government buy-in

For the SDGs to be achieved, the buy-in of national governments will be essential. Limited political terms and the complexity of the SDGs framework may be significant barriers to adequate uptake. However, these can be overcome by aligning national development priorities with the SDGs agenda in order to build the buy-in of national leaders.

This alignment has been successfully progressed in Indonesia, and ongoing work now aims to integrate and implement the SDGs framework through three core pillars:

- a robust policy and regulatory framework
- an inclusive institutional framework
- an effective accountability mechanism framework

The role of partnerships

In order to progress the SDGs agenda, researchers, the private sector, civil society and other stakeholders all have a responsibility to deliberately engage with the relevant Government departments and with each other in collaborative partnerships. Creating platforms and spaces for the facilitation of partnerships should be a priority for us as the development community.

Research has a unique role to play in the implementation of the SDGs with access to data and monitoring of the Goals being a high priority for government. Research which is significant, relevant, logical and realistic has the potential to influence policy, but effective partnerships will be required in order to activate that influence.

Thematic discussion:

Integration within the SDGs framework

Overview

The adoption of the SDGs has signalled a new phase for international development, and with it an opportunity to critically assess how new development targets and milestones are likely to be shaped and delivered. 193 countries have agreed on ambitious commitments covering a wide variety of sectors and topic areas.

To achieve the SDGs it is essential that our approach fully integrates the three dimensions of sustainability - social, economic and environmental - and all sectors of the economy and society, from the local to global level.

Issues and debates

Addressing our silos: To integrate across social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainability, the SDGs call for close partnerships between members of development organisations, governments, private companies, civil society and academia. Individual sectors cannot address these challenges in isolation.

Yet how often do these groups come together to jointly explore and act on a common challenge? Not often enough. Many organisations are still too comfortable in our silos, and too frequently unable to find confidence to give and take and to realise a shared sense of purpose – essential ingredients for any collaboration to become a true partnership.

Examples of challenges requiring integrated solutions across sectors:

- Obesity – requires solutions around food access, trade policy, urban design, inequality
- Climate Change – requires engagement by environmental science, economic policy, food producers, political actors

Dealing with multiple stakeholders: While the MDGs were largely driven by governments and NGOs, it is widely expected that the SDGs will need to engage a much larger set of external stakeholders – including businesses, universities and research institutions - far more effectively. However, uncertainty remains about how to successfully align research, advocacy, business and policy priorities to devise effective approaches.

Opportunities for development practitioners and researchers

- Establishing multi-sector and interdisciplinary collaborations, in particular between researchers and NGOs, which support an integrated comprehensive framework of sustainable development across sectors

- Developing organisational responses to the SDGs that include contributing to dialogue and partnerships with others (along the lines of Goal 17 on Partnerships for the Goals which has 19 targets concerning finance, technology, capacity building, trade and systemic issues)
- Considering key cross-cutting areas as important sites for collaboration, for example:
 - food (SDGs 1, 2 and 12)
 - health (SDGs 1, 3, 6, 7, 13, 14 and 15)
 - inequality (SDGs 1, 4, 5, 10 and 16)
 - economic growth (SDGs 8, 9 and 11)
- Considering how to address pre-conceptions about who we partner with, initiating collaborations with partners outside our sectors

Key discussion points

Synergies and trade-offs between the goals

Efforts to address a single goal need to be assessed on their impact, positive and negative, on other goals, and a framework is needed to manage synergies and trade-offs between the goals. The 17 Goals and 169 targets provide little if any guidance on how they are interconnected, including their synergies and trade-offs in contributing to overall sustainable human and environmental development. There is no clear means-ends continuum, no 'narrative of change,' no description of societal changes and policy reforms necessary to achieve the SDGs, and no elaboration of how this change could happen within existing socioeconomic and geopolitical circumstances.

We also face a challenge in integrating top-down and bottom-up approaches to the goals. Top-down approaches (primarily led by national governments and donor agencies) focus on a narrow sectoral response, while bottom-up approaches (NGOs, CSOs) focus on the impact on communities and individuals and view sectors as more integrated.

An Australian Government body to coordinate national cross-sector collaboration to support the implementation of the SDGs in the Asia-Pacific

An Australian Government-led and -funded coordinating body applying a comprehensive framework for the SDGs could enhance collaboration across sectors and disciplines. The group agreed that while the SDGs call for close partnerships between governments, donor agencies, civil society, academia and private sector, the Australian development community continues to operate in silos and uncertainty remains about how to successfully align priorities and approaches to the SDGs in our region.

The Australian Government could take a leadership role, coordinating Australia's combined efforts in supporting the implementation of the SDGs in the Asia-Pacific. The Government should establish a coordinating body with cross-sector representation that is tasked with drafting a comprehensive framework for collaboration to implement the SDGs. This framework would outline clear ways for how the different sectors and disciplines can work together, with funding commitments attached to specific Goals or clusters of Goals where Australia has specific interests and in-depth knowledge and expertise that can be leveraged. ACFID and RDI Network could facilitate sector engagement from Australian universities and NGOs.

More networking events and communication on the SDGs

There are increasingly more local events on the SDGs and we need to make sure relevant people and organisations are aware and engaged. Several collaborating events on the SDGs are being planned and we ought to take advantage and coordinate. We should also commit to some clear actions and establish a way of operating and communicating back to the broader sector as well as to senior staff at our own institutions. A proposal is to establish an SDGs Community Of Practice (CoP) under ACFID with representative advocacy and technical capacities.

Thematic discussion:

Monitoring and the SDGs

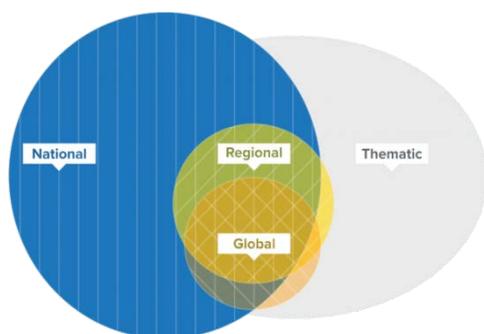
Overview

On 11 March 2016 the UN Statistical Commission agreed ‘as a practical starting point’ with the proposed global indicator framework: to measure progress towards the 17 goals and 169 targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

A proposed list of 230 SDG indicators has been set out by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs). The IAEG-SDGs will continue to work during 2016 -2017 to:

- take into account the proposals for refinements made by Member States
- report on progress developing and improving the global indicators, provide proposal for review of the indicator framework
- report on plans for methodologies for those indicators for which definitions and standards have yet to be developed.

What are the indicators?



Source: <http://deliver2030.org/?p=6094>

National Monitoring: each national government will decide the number and nature of national indicators drawing on both official and non-official data sources. A limited set of Global Monitoring Indicators will be integrated to allow international comparability.

Global Monitoring: Global Monitoring Indicators are harmonized to common standards for review by High Level Political Forum.

Regional Monitoring: this will provide a platform for knowledge-sharing, peer review and reciprocal learning. A small number of indicators may target regional priorities. Monitoring mechanisms build on existing regional mechanisms.

Thematic Monitoring: specialist indicators from epistemic communities to complement official indicators.

The indicators in the current proposal can be grouped into:

- Tier 1: Established methodology exists and data are already widely available;
- Tier 2: Methodology has been established but for which data are not easily available;
- Tier 3: Internationally agreed methodology not yet developed.

The IAEG-SDGs will continue to establish sources for Tier 2 and methodology for Tier 3 indicators. New sources and technologies for data collection will be explored, including through partnerships with civil society, private sector and academia. Regional work is also identifying Asia-Pacific regional and sub-regional priorities for SDG monitoring.¹

How will monitoring of the SDGs work?

The mechanics of SDG monitoring are still being worked out - the emerging consensus is:

- Focus of SDG monitoring will be at the national level
- Complementary monitoring at regional and global levels
- Each major thematic community (health, education, agriculture) will report progress towards achieving objectives. This will complement official monitoring and review at national, regional, and global levels.
- The UN Secretary-General will produce an annual progress report on the SDGs to support review at the high-level political forum
- IAEG-SDGs effort in refining indicators will continue

It will be the responsibility of National Statistic Offices to generate reports.
“Each country should pick the number and range of Complementary National Indicators that best suit its needs and capacity to collect and analyse data. Given the breadth of country circumstances we expect substantial variation in the number and type of national indicators that countries will adopt.”

Issues and debates

Too many indicators and deciding national sets of indicators: The proposed list of 230 indicators is long. There is still opportunity to reduce indicators recognising inter-linkages and multipurpose indicators. It is likely that countries (developed and developing) will want to take a minimalist approach, selecting a smaller set of indicators and compiling data from their existing collections. Which indicators will they select? How is this different from before? Who will decide and how will this be decided?

Sources of data and capacity to collect: Collecting indicator data will have to be accompanied by capacity-building efforts. It is estimated that the 77 ODA-eligible countries will need to spend approximately \$1 billion a year to upgrade their statistical systems.² Monitoring will need to be coordinated across ministries and other stakeholders. Who holds the data and what is its quality

¹ <http://www.unescap.org/events/monitoring-sustainable-development-goals-meeting-identify-asia-pacific-regional-and-sub>

² <http://unsdsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Data-For-Development-An-Action-Plan-July-2015.pdf>

and validity? What are innovative, technology-driven and cost-effective ways to collect data?

'Leaving no one behind' and issues of data disaggregation: SDG indicators should be disaggregated, where relevant, by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability and geographic location, or other characteristics. This requires significant resources and also policies and regulations. Methodological developments are still required.

Integrated framework: SDG indicators need to be considered as an integrated package and work in harmony with one another. Many important issues, such as conflict, gender equality, health, sustainable consumption and production, and nutrition, cut across goals and targets. The Goals and targets are themselves interdependent, and must be pursued together.

Defining new metrics and methodology: There are still a set of indicators that don't have clear metrics and means of measuring. There are no agreed international definitions or indicators to allow comparison across countries. There is an opportunity to use the SDGs as a vehicle to enrich debates about definitions of development and enhance data collection and use in the region.

Follow up and review – where is the accountability: Countries will self-report and there is concern that national reporting will not ensure accountability. "Accountability to their own citizens is key and the role of civil society in this regard is essential."³

Opportunities for development practitioners and researchers

- Defining new metrics and methodologies
- Reviewing metrics and their appropriateness
- Evaluating progress
- Strengthening civil society awareness and action on SDG monitoring
- Analysis and interpretation to consider the data in context
- Capacity building of national research communities

Key discussion points

Coordination in data collection

Voluntary reporting by governments on SDGs progress needs to take into account the diverse sources of data in a country. The need was identified for a framework at the national level in all countries which could bring together data from various sources. The group identified existing sites of data collection including census data, the electoral role, universities, project-level M&E data (including baselines) from NGOs and civil society. However, it was clear that these diverse sources are not always identified or known.

Data collected by non-government actors is not always used to inform country-wide reporting and civil society groups need to be encouraged to connect with a national framework for reporting on SDGs. Public data storage platforms managed by governments or non-government actors would be useful.

³ http://futureun.org/media/archive1/briefings/FUNDS_Brief26_Feb2015_Bissio.pdf

In regard to census and national registration processes, the responsibility lies as much with individuals as governments – to ensure that all are counted and no one is left behind.

Quality and validity of data

In efforts to assess quality and validity of data, it is important to consider the balance between transparency and privacy, and the need to protect sensitive data whilst ensuring opportunities for independent verification, for example through the use of open source data collection and storage platforms. The group identified the need for a mechanism to assess quality and validity of data from formal and non-formal sources to reduce the risk of data-overload or use of data lacking credibility. One challenge identified was that in many countries, the national census does not capture everyone. A role for universities across countries in the Asia-Pacific was identified by the group in contributing to data integrity, analysis and storage.

Indicator selection

The question of who is involved in making choices about which indicators are given priority within a given national context is an important and potentially sensitive one. The need for research and evidence to inform this process is key. There is a need to keep indicators relevant to a country whilst still meeting SDG reporting obligations. National multi-stakeholder fora are one avenue to ensure an inclusive indicator selection process, but such a process must be balanced by the need for a realistic set of indicators according to a country's needs and capacity.

One example of the need for indicator relevance given by the group was the occurrence of trachoma as a specific issue in certain countries which should be tracked nationally but may be lost in a global agenda. In some instances 'specifics' like this can be used as a proxy for a larger indicator e.g. access to universal health.

Thematic discussion:

Pathways and prioritisation for development

Overview

In the lead up to establishing the SDGs an enormous amount of collaboration occurred. Those left out of the discussion on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) had a voice at the table. Significant activity occurred with working groups, conferences, small and large meetings and sharing of comprehensive documents containing arguments, justifications for what should be included, and what should be left out. The results are 17 goals, 169 targets and a proposed list of 230 indicators that were developed to focus the development of the world over the next 15 years.

Furthermore, some countries, institutions and businesses have already started the discussion on what to prioritise, how to sift through the goals and targets that are best suited for them, who to work with and how. However, since all of the SDGs are important and all must be addressed, choosing goals based on their ease to achieve or those that are of high profile should be avoided. As the SDGs are all interlinked it is also important to keep considering how action in one area can have implications (both positive and negative) in other areas.

How will prioritising of the SDGs work?

The reality of how prioritisation will occur is yet to be seen. However, the structure of targets and indicators will influence this. The broad framework is as follows:

- Each national government will decide the number and nature of national indicators, which will affect country-led prioritisation of the SDGs.
- Country prioritisation will feed into regional priorities.
- Limited Global Monitoring Indicators will be integrated to allow international comparability
- The UN Secretary-General will produce an annual progress report on the SDGs to support review at the high-level political forum

Issues and debates

Too many indicators: There are 17 goals and 169 targets and a proposed list of 230 indicators for the SDGs. Trying to prioritise these is potentially extremely difficult and may look similar to prioritising nothing.

Country autonomy: The UN SDGs document recognises that each country has primary responsibility for its own economic and social development and the means required for implementation of the goals and targets.

Relevance: Not all goals and their corresponding targets will be relevant for all countries and regions, nor will it be possible to work on, monitor or evaluate *all* the targets. Different countries and regions will have different priorities.

Prioritise and customise: Prioritisation will therefore vary between countries and regions based on critical areas of importance. Will this dilute the global effectiveness of the SDGs?

Cherry picking: How can we ensure countries do not choose priorities that are easy to do or are politically driven rather than based on need? How do we ensure that chosen priorities can make a difference? How do we ensure integration of priorities and avoid silos, which were issues when addressing the MDGs.

Influence: How important is it to be aware of the influence of the private sector, as well as donor participation, on how priorities will be developed.

Economic analysis: Analysis conducted by a Copenhagen Consensus found that there are 19 specific targets within the 169 that would do more than \$15 of good for every dollar spent⁴. Is it appropriate to prioritise by economic analysis?

Opportunities for development practitioners and researchers

- Working with partner country governments and civil society to develop sound, participatory approaches to prioritisation
- Working with data to provide an evidence-base for justifying priorities
- Evaluating progress and contributing to changing priorities as growth, change or limitations are recognised
- Collaborating with private sector, civil society and governments to ensure priorities are based on need
- Capacity building of national research communities to play an active role

Key discussion points

Who will set priorities

The SDGs are too complex for governments alone to address and prioritise. There is a need to identify which stakeholders should be involved in setting priorities and what roles they should have. The group recognised that individual countries need to set their own SDG priorities for addressing gaps and allocating resources, and must have ownership of the process. The private sector is undeniably influential on SDG outcomes and must be involved in a meaningful way. The group discussed that businesses may need a value proposition to engage with the SDGs since their main goal is income generation. Emerging global alliances between governments, academics and NGOs were identified as an opportunity for action.

Data-driven choices

Data can support an evidence-based approach for identifying which SDG targets will yield the most benefit if they are prioritised. Selection of indicators and targets will be better informed with increased data availability which will enable more sensible prioritisation. In order to make this viable, the group stated that the Australian government must increase research funding to increase

⁴ <http://www.copenhagenconsensus.com/post-2015-consensus/nobel-laureates-guide-smarter-global-targets-2030>

the evidence base for decision-making. Currently, some data may be unavailable, inaccurate or politically influenced which inhibits its use in some sectors. Data generated for informing SDG prioritisation must fit country contexts, especially in regard to disability and equality issues. The group identified an opportunity for Australian tertiary institutions to build research capacity in Pacific institutions.

Setting a framework for the SDGs

The SDGs are not yet in a framework for most individual countries and must become a part of national agendas. This will require political will and commitment on the part of leaders. Clear articulation of the needs of policymakers must be made so that researchers can support integration of the SDGs into national agendas. The synergies and trade-offs between pursuing different SDGs within a country framework must also be considered to achieve the maximum benefits and meet targets. Some regions, such as the Pacific, do have a structure in place for pursuing the SDGs and it is important that countries work together within these. The group stated a need to address research and policy development priorities for bridging gaps between government, academic institutions and NGOs

Thematic discussion:

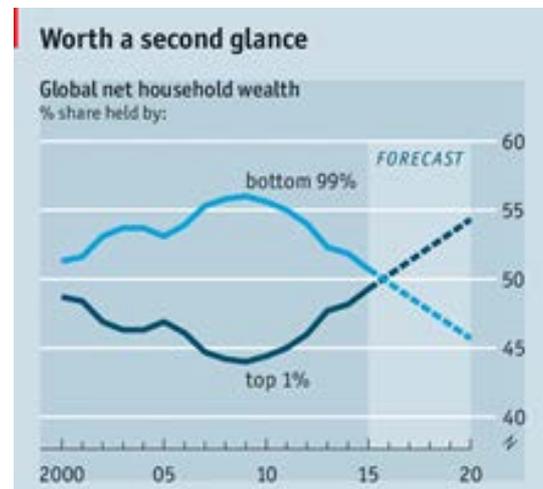
Addressing global inequality

Overview

Extreme inequalities are the defining issue of our time. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2013) over 75% of citizens live in societies in which income is more unequally distributed than in the 1990s.

The world is richer than ever before, but wealth and opportunities are increasingly concentrated in the hands of the few. Oxfam International announced that “the richest 1% have more wealth than the rest of the world combined.”⁵ This disparity is estimated to grow wider unless we are willing to address it. Rising inequalities are undercutting development progress, frustrating poverty eradication, and producing social, political and economic instability.

Inequality has been the discussion of many controversial books (e.g., Thomas Piketty’s *Capital in the Twenty-first Century*) and the subject of many international promises. For now, we have yet to live up to the Rio+20 promise to “strive for a world that is just, equitable and inclusive”⁶. In contrast to the Millennium Development Goals one could argue that the new Sustainable Development Goals have made addressing inequality a universal and cross-cutting issue with their overarching vision to “leave no one behind.”



The Economist, *The Wrong Yardstick* (2015)

What are the targets?

Inequality is nearly mainstreamed across all SDGs and visible in how targets are measured. For example, Goal 6 acknowledges that the greatest challenge remains addressing inequalities in access to water and sanitation. In addition, SDG 10 focuses specifically on tackling this problem: Reduce inequality within and among countries. Following the general principle that ‘policies should be universal in principle paying attention to the needs of disadvantaged and marginalised populations’⁷, the seven targets for 2030 are:

1. Sustain income growth of the bottom 40% of the population at a rate higher than the national average
2. Empower and promote the social, economic and

For Goal 6, within the Joint Monitoring Program led by WHO and UNICEF, a Task Force on Monitoring Inequalities for the 2030 agenda have been developing approaches to monitor inequality; including affordability of basic services, monitoring disability and accessibility as well as gender issues.

⁵ <file:///D:/Users/z3503438/Downloads/bp210-economy-one-percent-tax-havens-180116-en.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.uncsd2012.org/>

⁷ <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/inequality/>

political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, economic or other status

3. Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard
4. Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality
5. Improve the regulation and monitoring of global financial markets and institutions and strengthen the implementation of such regulations
6. Ensure enhanced representation and voice for developing countries in decision-making in global international economic and financial institutions in order to deliver more effective, credible, accountable and legitimate institutions
7. Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies

Furthermore, three additional global targets are:

- Implement the principle of special and differential treatment for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, in accordance with World Trade Organization agreements
- Encourage official development assistance and financial flows, including foreign direct investment, to States where the need is greatest, in particular least developed countries, African countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries, in accordance with their national plans and programmes
- Reduce to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent

Issues and debates

A key issue in addressing inequality worldwide among others is an issue of measurement. Economic inequality is a particularly pervasive and crosscutting form of inequality that is a pressing issue in all countries, negatively impacting human rights as well as poverty reduction and growth.

Presently the SDG 10 targets are proposed to be monitored through 11 indicators including: growth of household income, those living under the medium income range, labour share of GDP, financial soundness, personal discrimination, flow of development resources (recipient/donor), remittance costs and tariff lines. The Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR), for example, raised concern that there is no robust measure of economic inequality.

At least for now, many indicators lack adequate data and none really consider the socio-political and legal contexts that seem to lead to the rise of inequality within and between countries. This means going beyond the proposed set of SDGs indicators and adding nuanced and context-sensitive insight on why inequality is such a persistent problem.

Opportunities for development practitioners and researchers

- Reviewing proposed indicators about inequality and their appropriateness
- Qualitative and context-sensitive analysis on the sources of inequality
- Increase access to information about inequality
- Support civil society programmes and actions demanding equality
- Work with partners to lobby the Australian Government to address taxation and tax evasion of the rich
- Campaigns to publically shame tax evasion and/or practice promoting equality
- Work with the Australian private sector on fair trade and participatory and ethical business practices

Key discussion points

The SDGs agenda must address inequality at all levels

Inequality between countries is often the main concern of international development. However, in a globalized and interconnected world an analysis of inequality between groups in different countries is also of enormous importance. It is not sufficient to compare countries, or even regions. Valuable comparison is also needed between groups, demographics and peoples.

There are various structures, such as trade regimes and unfair supply chains, which favour more powerful economies and wealthier consumers, but perpetuate a system of deep inequality between and within countries. As such, we should consider the scope and granular size of our analysis when defining inequality, and aim to identify the ways in which peoples are connected and able to exercise influence across borders in order to expose and impact on inequality. We must also consider how developing countries can achieve industrialisation without following the fossil fuel-intensive, environmentally unsound methods of today's developed countries.

Working toward a joint sense of responsibility: demand for equality must come from both wealthy and poor countries, groups and individuals

Demand for equality is often left in the hands of the poor and oppressed while it is the wealthy that have the power to bring about greater equality or prevent this from happening. Similarly, development organisations work more frequently on empowering the poor rather than working with the influential in government and private sector to effect change. In the end, the responsibility for reducing inequality between peoples and groups, lifting incomes in the developing world, and fixing social structures lies with both wealthy and poor countries, groups and people.

This requires a multi-pronged approach: continuing to work with the disadvantaged to raise their voice and mobilise, while also working with those who influence politics and economics to distribute wealth and power and provide opportunities for others to be raised out of poverty. Furthermore, the average consumer needs to understand their role in contributing to inequality by not understanding the dynamics of cheap consumer-goods and exploitation abroad. In the end, we

all have a role to play and need to overcome a collective paralysis or fear that keeps us from tackling inequality.

Mobilising around an agenda for inclusive or collective growth and joint responsibilities is more powerful than focusing on divisions and inequalities. In developed, donor countries, catalysing this approach may be helpful for increasing political support for foreign aid while also enhancing responsible business practices and philanthropy.

Research must support good measures of inequality which can be used to empower people

To address inequality, we first need to understand its dynamics better. Too often accurate information is superseded by existing perceptions about how things are and expectations of what should be. It is important to counter misperceptions alongside providing easy access to adequate information. Education and advocacy need to go hand in hand. Too often both wealthy and poor individuals incorrectly believe themselves to be closer to average wealth.

Understanding inequality, however, needs to move above and beyond an understanding of monetary wealth and income inequality. We need to develop additional, more nuanced indicators for understanding and monitoring (change in) inequality. Research needs to focus on the lived experience of inequality at a local, granular level and among different demographics and groups, especially those that rarely feature in existing measures of inequality (e.g. the displaced or stateless). In addition we need to explore why (and also why not) social mobility occurs. Inequality is the result of a complex interplay of not only political and economic, but also geographic, social, cultural and historical factors.

Research, coupled with awareness-raising and advocacy, can empower on various level. It can empower the poor to find a way out of poverty and the wealthy to find ways to distribute their wealth. Instead of only identifying inequalities, we need to become better at implementing practical measures and policies of addressing and reducing inequality. It is important to facilitate a continuous feedback loop between practitioners, researchers and policy makers; only then can we succeed in tackling pervasive poverty and inequality.

Thematic discussion:

Aid and development in a globalised world

Overview

The SDGs present an extensive agenda, touching on a comprehensive array of sectors and issues concerned with development. They are ambitious in scope and pose challenges to all nations, not only low and middle income countries.

Despite rising global funding for international development, the Australian government has decreased its budget commitment to development assistance. Official development assistance (ODA) now lies at around 0.22% of Gross National Income (GNI) – in stark contrast to earlier Australian bipartisan commitments of 0.5% GNI. It is well below levels recommended by the OECD and UN. Since 2013 over \$11 billion has been stripped away from budgeted forward estimates; this affects what can be achieved, the channels through which it is distributed, and the role that Australia can play in the region and internationally.

The Australian development sector – including NGOs, civil society, government and academia – has been proud of its special relationships with countries in the Asia-Pacific region. These relationships have been damaged by reductions in Australian development assistance. Despite this, the Australian development community is resilient, has maintained its partnerships with organisations and peoples of the region, and should engage actively with the SDG agenda to ensure that ongoing efforts consolidate national and global development agendas.

Issues and debates

Agreement on the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the associated SDGs poses important challenges for Australia given the context highlighted above. What role can Australian institutions play in supporting organisations and governments in the Asia-Pacific region to achieve the Goals?

The SDGs have helped shift the dynamics of development from more traditional donor-recipient relationships to an approach characterised by universality and shared challenges. Development relationship and partnerships are fundamentally different in the context of the SDGs. Among the new dynamics is an environment of knowledge exchange with two-way sharing of lessons and perspectives.

This raises the question as to what Australia – through NGOs and broader civil society, academics and government – can best contribute to promoting and achieving the SDGs? What forms of support to development, and what kinds of partnership, are most desirable and appropriate?

Opportunities for development practitioners and researchers

- Adjust to new concepts of development and partnerships
- Time to rethink collaboration within sectors at project level

- Need for variety of forms of data and evidence
- Build on transformative potential – equity, leave no one behind, genuine partnerships, supporting capacity development, cross-sectoral approaches
- Work to encourage and support Australian government commitment to the SDGs and to recognising valuable role of civil society and research institutions
- Identify opportunities to work with different partners – national government, private sector, other researchers and academic institutions – recognise different stakeholders can each contribute valuable skills, concepts, insights, approaches, data

Key discussion points

Conventional relationships and forms of engagement with development should be critiqued and innovative approaches encouraged.

The Agenda for Development and SDGs are more comprehensive than previous frameworks and recognise the interface between one set of development objectives and those operating through other sectors. While the more narrowly defined MDGs still require attention, the SDGs recognise that multi-sectoral and multi-level engagement and commitment are necessary to achieve desired outcomes.

Recognising these interdependencies allows for more comprehensive approaches to development, requiring partnerships that build on the strengths and expertise of a wider range of stakeholders than would be required to tackle more narrowly conceptualised issues. These new forms of engagement present a challenge to NGOs or other organisations that have often worked within a single sector in a specific location working on a particular project with a particular partner. More innovative models indicate that this should be critiqued, and opportunities to work with a wider range of partners with a shared and more comprehensive approach is required.

The skills, experience and contextual insights of in-country personnel and institutions should be recognised

The keynote speakers had earlier highlighted the importance of ensuring that international and global targets are recast within a country context or regional (e.g. small islands states in Pacific) perspective. This would require a more thorough understanding and analysis of country-level needs, challenges and development priorities - identified within national processes - so that interfaces and complementarities within the SDGs can be supported.

Furthermore, the considerable expertise and capacity present in-country must be clearly recognised and supported to lead such processes of shaping priorities, devising strategies for implementation and determining means of monitoring and evaluation. Governments and agencies from Australia can play important roles in supporting capacity development and in contributing insights and expertise to assist national bodies to fine-tune their approaches. They can also play an

important role in ensuring that universal values such as leaving no one behind and promoting equity are upheld.

The Australian Government, academic institutions and civil society structures all have an important role to play

Existing capacity within the region can be strengthened and capitalised upon with the support of the Australian government and the wide range of interested and committed Australian NGOs and research institutions. This is particularly important in the area of generating data and evidence which can be used to inform policy and practice.

Australia has competent institutions, committed personnel and significant expertise which would benefit from Government support to leverage existing regional capacity to conceptualise, implement and monitor the impact of development initiatives and investments.

Call to Action

Below is a summary of the key suggestions and commitments made by participants on behalf of the Sydney-based development sector to work towards the uptake and implementation of the SDGs agenda.

Working together

High importance was placed on approaching the SDGs in an integrated and collaborative manner. Researchers, policymakers, practitioners and local communities need to work together across areas of expertise to harmonise and unite behind shared goals. Further, it was noted that the private sector, which is often overlooked, must be engaged in this approach.

Mapping and making use of existing networks was offered as a way of building this structure, with effective leadership identified as a key requirement to drive and coordinate collaboration. ACFID and RDI Network were called on to bring groups together and provide direction for collaborative action within the sector, and initiate engagement with other sectors through bodies such as the Australian Council of Community Services (ACOSS).

Managing partnerships with partner countries

While a variety of Australian-based experts have special roles to play, participants put particular emphasis on the importance of balanced and effective partnerships with developing countries. The need to ensure control in decision-making and prioritisation remained with developing countries was emphasised. South-South partnerships were also encouraged to increase developing country leadership and ownership of the SDGs agenda.

Where possible, local expertise should be drawn on and communities should be given opportunities to lead efforts toward achieving targets. This has the benefits of empowering local stakeholders and increasing the relevance of SDGs to their countries. To enable partner country capacity, it is worthwhile to invest in developing key organisations such as national statistics offices and local research institutions. The participants also called for special efforts to train and include young people and students in addressing SDGs.

Raising the profile of the SDGs

Whether the focus is at home or abroad, there is a need to put the SDGs at the front and centre of development work. For national governments, this means aligning SDGs with national priorities and integrating them into national development plans. It also demands investment in awareness-raising campaigns and advocacy. The need to uptake the SDGs agenda domestically in Australia was also highlighted, with the recommendation that the Australian Government undertake reporting on domestic SDG progress.

For NGOs, research institutions and other organisations, their development work and research should aim to align with SDG priorities in-country so that 'business-as-usual' reflects SDG targets.

Monitoring and collecting data

Each of our organisations have a key role to play in monitoring progress towards the SDGs, and there needs to be a careful balance between standardisation and contextualisation of methods and indicators of reporting. Clear communication on data collection and interpretation must occur to promote transparency and reconcile different motivations between stakeholders. Above all, countries must decide and make explicit what their data needs are and why, and what obstacles must be overcome to meet them.

Closing Statements

The forum closed with concluding thoughts shared by a panel comprising the two keynote presenters and invited participants.

Achieving the SDGs may be a daunting task, but harmonising multiple stakeholders and integrating areas of expertise will provide much needed guidance. Significant value is found working in shared spaces, sharing data and information, making our own interests explicit and learning from the interests of others. In addition, building durable and accountable relationships between partners is the basis for successful collaboration.

To succeed in these endeavours, we must overcome our tendencies to work in silos and improve our coordination within and across organisations. Taking stock of existing resources in terms of technology, expertise, networks and communication channels will help us forge the unity needed to meet the SDGs.

The SDGs agenda is inherently political and we need to take time to understand the interests and priorities of all actors in order to make progress. We need to think carefully about what the SDGs mean to each of our organisations, and how this influences our approaches. Contextualisation is important for making the SDGs relevant to countries and they must align with national agendas if we expect them to take on meaning. This process will naturally require prioritisation of some SDGs over others at country level, and we need to consider how we can mitigate trade-offs and create synergies for advancing as many goals as possible.

Some developing countries have started taking steps toward engaging with the SDGs and the Australian community must figure out what value they can add to working with these countries.

We must get civil society behind the SDGs because we cannot expect government to do it alone. In fact, the best way of influencing government may be through a social movement rather than a top-down effort. To make this a reality, we must promote SDG literacy amongst the public and encourage them to make partnerships with government on achieving SDG targets. We must also gain and sustain government commitment to the SDGs by ensuring that it is presented as a realistic, relevant, logical and significant framework with which they can work.

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About the Research for Development Impact (RDI) Network

The Research for Development Impact (RDI) Network is a network of over 900 practitioners, researchers and evaluators working in international development and global social justice.

The Network leads, stimulates and supports:

- Effective, ethical development research practice
- Cross-sector partnerships and linkages
- Uptake and use of evidence in policy and practice

Working in close partnership with the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), the Network functions as a key cross-sectoral platform for shared learning and action.

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About the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)

The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) is a global network of universities and knowledge institutions that mobilises scientific and technical expertise from academia, civil society, and the private sector in support of sustainable development and the SDGs.

SDSN Australia/Pacific works with SDSN members in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific to take a leading role in supporting the implementation of the SDGs in our countries and region (ap-unsdsn.org).