



Distr.  
LIMITED  
E/ESCWA/SDPD/2013/Technical Paper.8  
2 January 2014  
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

## ESCWA Discussion Paper

---

# SDG Priority Conceptual Issues: Towards an Arab Approach for the Sustainable Development Goals

---

*Draft document for discussion  
at the*

**Arab Regional Consultative Dialogue on the Sustainable  
Development Goals**

**(Tunisia, 18-19 November 2013)**

**October 2013**

---

Note: This document has been reproduced in the form in which it was received, without formal editing. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of ESCWA.

## Table of Contents

<b>A. Introduction: SDGs and Arab Regional Priorities for Post-2015 .....</b>	<b>3</b>
1. SDGs – Why they're important for the Arab region and why the region's voice matters .....	4
2. Learning from the MDGs: addressing the strengths and weaknesses of the MDG framework .....	5
3. Arab Regional Progress on MDGs and Priorities for the Post-2015 Agenda.....	6
<b>B. Discussion on Key SDG Conceptual Issues .....</b>	<b>10</b>
1. SDGs that are universal and yet cater for national diversity in the Arab region .....	11
2. Addressing the science-policy interface: an SDG framework that effectively integrates the three dimensions of sustainable development .....	13
3. A New Global Partnership for Sustainable Development: addressing means of implementation and accountability and follow-up.....	18
<b>C. A Proposed Approach to the SDGs that Works for the Arab Region .....</b>	<b>24</b>
1. Principles and priorities of importance to the Arab Region .....	24
2. Universal Goals with Integrated Nationally-Selected Targets .....	25
3. A New Global Partnership for the SDGs Framework – Means of Implementation and Accountability.....	27
Figure 1: A Proposed Approach to the SDGs that Works for the Arab Region .....	29

## A. Introduction: SDGs and Arab Regional Priorities for Post-2015

The intergovernmental process launched at Rio+20 to develop global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is now well underway, with a proposal due from the intergovernmental Open Working Group (OWG) on SDGs by September 2014. The OWG is one of several processes that are shaping the post-2015 development agenda which will replace the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) framework (see **Box 1**). The UN General Assembly recently agreed that intergovernmental negotiations on the post-2015 agenda would start during the 69<sup>th</sup> Session, with a new development agenda to be adopted at a global summit in September 2015. There is now broad consensus for a single post-2015 development framework containing a single set of goals that are universally applicable to all countries yet adaptable to different national realities and priorities. The proposal from the OWG on the SDGs will therefore provide an important basis for finalising the post-2015 outcome.

As the intergovernmental process for the SDGs proceeds, the global discourse appears to have converged on the notion that they must connect poverty alleviation, human wellbeing, and environmental protection within a universal, integrated and transformative framework. Over the last year, a plethora of UN bodies, policy analysts, advocacy organizations, and research groups have published proposals and ideas to help shape the agenda. This has included several important Arab regional publications and consultation processes that have helped to shape a regional perspective on the SDGs. The purpose of this paper is to draw upon the wealth of publications, reports, think pieces and consultations to date to provide an up-to-date overview on current thinking on key conceptual issues that will shape the SDGs, and propose key aspects of a framework that would work for the Arab region given its specific priorities and circumstances. The aim is to help to shape a strong Arab voice in the ongoing processes determining the SDGs.

This paper has been prepared by ESCWA to inform discussions amongst Arab stakeholders at the Arab Consultative Meeting on SDGs organised by ESCWA, UNEP, the League of Arab States and the Government of Tunisia (Tunisia, 18-19 November 2013). The views expressed in the paper are preliminary thoughts to stimulate discussions.

### Box 1: Summary of Key Global Processes on SDGs and Post-2015

- **OWG - Open Working Group on SDGs:** In January 2013, as an outcome from Rio+20, the UN General Assembly established an intergovernmental Open Working Group (OWG) to prepare a proposal for the SDGs. The OWG is co-chaired by Kenya and Hungary and includes Arab country representatives from Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates. Four meetings of the OWG have taken place to date, with four remaining meetings to occur in November and December 2013, and January and February 2014. The OWG will prepare a proposal for the SDGs by September 2014 for consideration by the 68<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly.
- **HLP - High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda:** the HLP was established by the UN Secretary-General to advise on a bold but practical development agenda beyond 2015. Comprising representatives from 27 countries, the HLP published its final report to the Secretary-General in May 2013 which included a proposal for 12 goals<sup>1</sup>.
- **UNTT – UN Task Team on the Post-2015 Development Agenda:** The UNTT comprises over 60 UN entities and international organisations and is responsible for coordinating the efforts of the UN System and proposing a unified vision for the definition of a post-2015 development agenda. The UNTT comprises four working groups, including the UN Technical Support Team on SDGs (see below). The UNTT published its report in June 2012 which proposes that the MDG framework be retained but reorganised along four key dimensions of a more holistic approach: inclusive social development; inclusive economic development; environmental sustainability; and peace and security.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See [http://www.un.org/sg/management/pdf/HLP\\_P2015\\_Report.pdf](http://www.un.org/sg/management/pdf/HLP_P2015_Report.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Post\\_2015\\_UNTTreport.pdf](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Post_2015_UNTTreport.pdf)

- **UNTST – UN Technical Support Team on SDGs:** The UNTST is one of four working groups of the UNTT and is responsible for preparing initial inputs on priority issues for consideration by the OWG and supporting the work of the OWG as required. The UNTST has prepared issues briefs for consideration by the OWG in advance of each meeting.<sup>3</sup>
- **SDSN – Sustainable Development Solutions Network:** The SDSN was established by the UN Secretary-General as an independent global network of research centres, universities and technical institutions to help find solutions for pressing environmental, social and economic problems. Based at the Earth Institute in Colombia University, the SDSN published their report to the Secretary-General in June 2013 which includes a proposal for 10 goals.<sup>4</sup>
- **HLPF – High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development:** The HLPF was a key outcome from Rio+20 and was established by the General Assembly in June 2013 (67/290) following an intergovernmental negotiation process which defined the format and organisational aspects of the HLPF. The inaugural meeting of the HLPF was held in September 2013, with annual meetings to be held under the UN Economic and Social Council as well as meetings every four years at the Heads of State level under the auspices of the General Assembly. Regional Commissions are invited to hold annual regional preparatory meetings in advance of each meeting of the HLPF. A key function of the HLPF will be to follow up and review progress on the SDGs.

## 1. SDGs – Why they're important for the Arab region and why the region's voice matters

Over the past 20 years, two significant international outcomes have shaped global, regional and national development efforts: the adoption of Agenda 21 in 1992 setting out a strategy for achieving sustainable development; and the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 aiming to improve life for the world's poorest and most vulnerable by 2015.<sup>5</sup> Both outcomes had their successes and shortcomings. While Agenda 21 led to some important successes in raising the profile of environmental issues and integrated management of natural resources, its main supporters and proponents were environmental professionals and the holistic approach of sustainable development that integrates environmental, social and economic dimensions was never fully realised. Further, the international institution charged with implementation and follow-up (i.e. the now defunct Commission for Sustainable Development), failed to garner the international momentum required for such an ambitious agenda.

On the other hand, the MDGs have met with considerable success in generating international support and global cooperation and significant progress has been made in reducing poverty and increasing human wellbeing, although progress has been unequal between regions and countries and within countries. In addition, the limited focus of the MDGs on developing countries as well as the limited breadth of issues addressed has meant that the MDGs also fell short of a truly integrated, balanced and transformative development agenda.

Of course, the world has also changed considerably over the last 20 years. The gradual spread of global prosperity and poverty reduction has shifted the lines of the divide between developed and developing countries and re-balanced global power.<sup>6</sup> However, a series of global and regional food, energy, climate, financial and political crises that have affected all regions have significantly altered the course of development

<sup>3</sup> See <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1549>

<sup>4</sup> See <http://unsdsn.org/>

<sup>5</sup> Tighe Geoghegan (2013) *Post-2015: framing a new approach to sustainable development*, Policy Paper for the Independent Research Forum on a Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda, <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1690IRF%20Framework%20Paper.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Tighe Geoghegan (2013)

and threatened to jeopardise the progress made. Scientists propose that such crises reflect global resource scarcities which suggest that global development is reaching natural limits or boundaries.<sup>7</sup>

The agreement by the international community last year at Rio+20 to develop universal SDGs presents an important opportunity for the international community to at last merge these parallel 'development' and 'sustainable development' agendas. With negotiations and consultations on the goals well underway, there is now wide support for a single post-2015 development framework containing a single set of goals that are universally applicable to all countries but adaptable to different national realities and priorities.

The SDGs, if well-designed, targeted and measurable, will make a significant contribution to global and regional cooperation on development. They will dominate the development discourse for at least the next 15 years through bilateral, multilateral and UN funding and programming, and will have far-reaching implications for national planning in both developed and developing countries, including Arab countries.

The Arab region is unique in the world – it has a common language and shared culture and history and a long-standing record of cooperation and collaboration between Arab countries. The idea of regional integration among Arab countries has been pursued for decades through the League of Arab States, with efforts dating back to the 1950s - earlier than in any other developing region.<sup>8</sup> The region faces many common challenges including expanding populations, a growing youth bulge and high unemployment, rapid urbanisation and crowding cities, large flows of immigrants, and shortages of arable land, food and water. With the advent of the so-called 'Arab Spring' and events that have followed, peace and security, governance, and human rights have been elevated to the top of the regional development agenda. However, countries in the region also have tremendous economic, demographic and social diversity and the capacity of individual countries to address development challenges also varies considerably. Further, the region has not fully exploited the potential for regional cooperation and economic integration and more can be done to enable the region to speak with a shared voice. The common challenges faced, as well as the areas of difference present greater opportunities for regional cooperation, integration and partnerships to assist development progress.

With the new global development framework now unfolding, it is timely for the region to discuss its perspectives and priorities and help to shape an agenda that works for the Arab region. To do so, it will be critical that the Arab voice is heard loud and clear in the intergovernmental processes that are determining the SDGs, to help shape an outcome that is ultimately useful and beneficial to Arab countries.

## **2. Learning from the MDGs: addressing the strengths and weaknesses of the MDG framework**

The MDGs gave political momentum and visibility to the importance of human development at national, regional and global levels. They demonstrated that international goals can galvanise action and political will towards a core set of development priorities and are widely recognised for serving as a rallying point for different actors in combating poverty in its various forms and manifestations.<sup>9</sup> The strengths of the MDGs can be summarised as increasing government commitments to poverty reduction, rallying the world behind a moral purpose, providing policy direction, setting out clear and time-bound outcome indicators, catalyzing

---

<sup>7</sup> Rockstrom J, Sachs J, Ohman M, Schidt-Traub G (2013) *Sustainable Development and Planetary Boundaries – Background Research Paper*, submitted to the High-Level Panel on the Post 2015 Agenda, [http://www.post2015hlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Rockstroem-Sachs-Oehman-Schmidt-Traub\\_Sustainable-Development-and-Planetary-Boundaries.pdf](http://www.post2015hlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Rockstroem-Sachs-Oehman-Schmidt-Traub_Sustainable-Development-and-Planetary-Boundaries.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> World Bank (2012) *From Political to Economic Awakening in the Arab World: The Path of Economic Integration*, The World Bank, available at: [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2012/05/25/000333038\\_20120525021154/Rendered/PDF/688320vol020ES05023020120Box369244B.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2012/05/25/000333038_20120525021154/Rendered/PDF/688320vol020ES05023020120Box369244B.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> UN Technical Support Team (UNTST) (2013) *SDGs Issues Brief: Conceptual Issues*, prepared for the Open Working Group on SDGs March 2013, <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1729stissuesconceptual2.pdf>

increased investments in several important areas and sustaining efforts to promote development.<sup>10</sup> Their simplicity and brevity are also seen as having contributed to their success. The format of the MDG framework brought an inspirational vision together with a set of concrete and time-bound goals and targets that could be monitored by statistically-robust indicators.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, the MDGs have also been criticised on a number of grounds. Aside from the fact that many of the targets have not yet been met, the goals themselves proved limited in scope in relation to the Millennium Declaration. In particular, they did not adequately address important issues such as environmental sustainability, social exclusion, inequality, human rights, governance and security and means of implementation. Further, they were donor-centric and did not recognise the very different starting points of developing countries, they did not adequately address the rate of improvement, and they favoured quantity over quality. Above all, the MDGs have not been resilient in the face of recent shocks caused by volatile world markets, resource scarcities and disasters.

It is widely recognised that the SDGs will need to accelerate and continue the work begun under the banner of the MDGs, achieve greater economic and social inclusion, and emphasise the integration and balance among economic, social and environmental aspirations.<sup>12</sup> To do so, the framing of the SDGs should be broader than the MDGs – while poverty eradication must remain the overriding objective, the new agenda will need to represent a paradigm shift in international development towards inclusive, people-centred, sustainable development.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. Arab Regional Progress on MDGs and Priorities for the Post-2015 Agenda

*“In the Arab region, persistent shortfalls in governance and economic exclusion... contribute to explaining why some countries, although having done well in achieving the MDGs, have spearheaded social unrest”<sup>14</sup>*

It is hard to address sustainable development in the Arab region without due consideration of its particular political context. Indeed, the region has suffered and continues to suffer from the repercussions of occupation, instability and conflict. Home to the longest and last modern-time case of military occupation in Palestine, the region has more recently witnessed different forms of violence, aggression and conflict in most of its countries, notably in countries of the ‘Arab Spring’. There is widespread recognition that sustainable development is not possible without the achievement of peace and security, and that “special support is required to meet the development needs of people suffering from these problems, particularly people living under occupation”.<sup>15</sup>

The Arab region has had a mixed performance on the MDGs – it has made significant progress towards some targets (notably primary school enrolment and literacy and gender parity in education), however it lags behind on important targets relating to hunger, food insecurity, access to water, improved sanitation and child and maternal mortality.<sup>16</sup> It is therefore important from an Arab regional point of view that the global community

---

<sup>10</sup> Bates-Eamer, Nicole, Barry Carin, Min Ha Lee, Wonhuk Lim and Mukesh Kapila (2012) *Post-2015 Development Agenda: Goals, Targets and Indicators*, CIGI-KDI, [http://www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/MDG\\_Post\\_2015v3.pdf](http://www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/MDG_Post_2015v3.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> UN Task Team on Post-2015 (UNTT) (2012) *Realizing the Future We Want For All*, Report to the Secretary-General, [http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Post\\_2015\\_UNTTreport.pdf](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Post_2015_UNTTreport.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> UNTST (2013)

<sup>13</sup> UNTT (2012)

<sup>14</sup> United Nations and LAS (2013) *The Arab Millennium Development Goals Report: Facing Challenges and Looking Beyond 2015*, [http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/E\\_ESCWA\\_EDGD\\_2013\\_1\\_E.pdf](http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/E_ESCWA_EDGD_2013_1_E.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> ESCWA (2011) *Outcomes of the Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting for Rio+20*

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

maintains a firm commitment to the full implementation of the MDGs and not to divert resources dedicated to their achievement.<sup>17</sup>

In comparison with other developing regions in the world, the Arab region is least affected by extreme poverty. However, while poverty rates in other developing regions have decreased, they have remained the same in the Arab region since 1990 despite the increase in per capita income during the period. This reflects *inequalities in the distribution of development gains* which undermine political and social stability. Progress on the goals has also been uneven across sub-regions and countries: the Gulf Cooperation Council countries will largely achieve the MDG targets; middle income countries have mixed progress; while least developed countries are unlikely to achieve most MDGs. A multidimensional approach to poverty eradication should therefore remain an overarching goal of the SDGs, which perhaps should have a focus on the development process as much as on development outcomes.

The latest MDG progress report for the Arab region highlights an interesting anomaly in MDG progress in the region – some of the leading performers on many MDGs (e.g. Egypt, Tunisia and Syria) are also those countries that are experiencing social upheavals and political unrest.<sup>18</sup> This exposes potential *governance and participation deficits* and underscores the importance of considering sub-national inequalities and differences. The report argues that any proposed post-2015 framework should therefore have governance- and equity-related targets and indicators at its core to capture and monitor the reforms required to uphold human rights, participatory decision-making and people's dignity.<sup>19</sup>

However, progress against the MDGs does not tell the entire story on development priorities and challenges for the Arab region – a region facing a broad array of interlinked environmental, social and economic challenges. On the environmental front, the region has the lowest freshwater availability per capita of any region of the world combined with declining availability of arable land, land degradation and worsening climate change impacts.<sup>20</sup> This raises serious questions with regard to regional food security. Food deficits are largely bridged by imports and over-exploitation of finite resources which leaves the region vulnerable to shocks. While energy resources such as oil and gas have become embedded as the backbone of regional trade and production, not all countries in the Arab region are energy rich. Energy security is also becoming a serious concern for oil-importing countries in the region due to volatile and increasing oil prices, as well as inefficiencies in use and production.

There are a range of demographic trends that are exacerbating these problems. The Arab population has nearly tripled since 1970 and over half the region's population now lives in cities.<sup>21</sup> The region is projected to see its urban population more than double between 2010 and 2050.<sup>22</sup> This places a major stress on governments to provide basic services such as energy, water, waste and sanitation - as well as decent work.

Unemployment rates have been increasing and job creation remains one of the most critical social development challenges, particularly for youth and women. Indeed, unemployment rates in 2013 surpassed their 1990 levels, with one out of four Arab youths and one out of five Arab women being jobless.<sup>23</sup> More than

---

<sup>17</sup> Statement by Tunisia during the 1<sup>st</sup> session of the meetings of the OWG on SDGs (14-15 March 2013).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> AFED (2011) *Arab Environment 4: Green Economy – Sustainable Transition in a changing Arab world*, <http://afedonline.org/Report2011/PDF/En/Full-eng.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> ESCWA (2009) *The Demographic Profile of the Arab Countries*, (E/ESCWA/SDD/2009/Technical Paper.9), UNESCWA, Beirut;

<sup>22</sup> UNDP (2010) *Population Levels, Trends and Policies in the Arab region: Challenges and Opportunities*, Research Paper by Barry Mirkin for Arab Human Development Report, UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States, <http://www.arab-hdr.org/publications/other/ahdrps/paper01-en.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> UN and LAS (2013).



half the region's population is below the age of 25 and is increasingly more educated and mobile.<sup>24</sup> Millions of decent jobs need to be created each year to service this growing demand.<sup>25</sup> In response to this challenge, Tunisia, for example, has called for having a goal on job creation and decent work for all, with associated targets relating to global trade system reforms, diversification of the economies and enhancing productive capacities.<sup>26</sup>

The economic situation and outlook for the region is mixed - while some countries enjoy stable growth and development, others face complex emergency, occupation or security situations which weigh on growth. The Arab region remains the least industrialised middle-income region in the world and it has been unsuccessful at developing a strong private sector that generates productive employment for youth.<sup>27</sup> Stronger and smarter growth is urgently needed to spur job creation and provide the population with tangible benefits. For this to be possible, Arab countries need access to markets and technology, and the global community should strive to address distortions through systemic and structural global governance reforms to trade, investment, debt and intellectual property rights.<sup>28</sup> For countries suffering or emerging from situations of instability and conflict, tackling corruption, halting the illicit transfer of resources, and repatriation of assets will provide a source of additional financing that is desperately needed for advancing sustainable development in these countries.<sup>29</sup>

This complex and interlinked web of political, economic, social and environmental challenges faced by the region points towards the need for a truly transformative, integrated and long-term regional development agenda. While these challenges resonate with those experienced in other regions, they also have a unique set of drivers. For the Arab region, governance reforms are at the core of addressing many of these interlinked challenges in an integrated, participatory, transparent, equitable and inclusive way. Job creation, equitable growth and addressing growing resource scarcities will be key development priorities for the region going forward. These issues would need to be adequately addressed by the emerging SDG framework for it to be meaningful for the Arab world.

In the Arab region, persistent shortfalls in governance and economic exclusion, including at the sub-national level, contribute to explaining why some countries, although having done well in achieving the MDGs, have spearheaded social unrest.<sup>30</sup> As such, for the post-2015 agenda to work for the Arab region, it will need to be underpinned by principles such as the respect for human rights, equity, democratic governance and the rule of law.

The consideration of key principles and priorities for the post-2015 agenda from an Arab regional perspective is an important initial consideration for the region. At the global level, governments agreed at Rio+20 that the SDGs need to be action-oriented, concise, easy-to-communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable. A range of global principles and priorities have also been highlighted in major global reports (see [Box 2](#)). Several Arab regional consultations and reports on the post-2015 agenda and SDGs have been completed over the past several months, including consultations at the regional and national levels in selected Arab countries. These consultations and reports further highlight a range of messages and priorities for a post-2015 agenda that works for the Arab region (see [Box 2](#)).

---

<sup>24</sup> ESCWA & UNPY (2010) "Regional Overview: Youth in the Arab Region", United Nations, Beirut.

<sup>25</sup> UNDP (2010). Estimates are of 5 million new jobs needed per year to 2030 to avoid an increase in the rate of unemployment.

<sup>26</sup> Statement by Tunisia during the 4<sup>th</sup> session of the meetings of the OWG on SDGs (17-19 June 2013).

<sup>27</sup> UN and LAS (2013)

<sup>28</sup> Statement by Egypt during the 2<sup>nd</sup> session of the meetings of the OWG on SDGs (17-19 April 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Statement by Egypt during the 1<sup>st</sup> session of the meetings of the OWG on SDGs (14-15 March 2013).

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*



## Box 2. Principles & Messages from Global Reports and Arab Regional Consultations on Post-2015 and SDGs

### Principles for the Post-2015 Agenda and SDGs from Major Global Reports

- *Three fundamental principles* of human rights, equality and sustainability as well as *four dimensions* of: inclusive social development, environmental sustainability, inclusive economic development and peace and security.<sup>31</sup>
- *One fundamental shift* of recognising peace and good governance as core elements of wellbeing, along with *five big transformative shifts*: (i) leave no one behind; (ii) put sustainable development at the core; (iii) transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth; (iv) build peace and effective, open and accountable institutions for all; and (v) forge a new global partnership.<sup>32</sup>
- Four principles needed to underpin the post-2015 agenda: integrated development; equality; human-rights based approach; and resilience.<sup>33</sup>

### A Regional Perspective on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda<sup>34</sup>

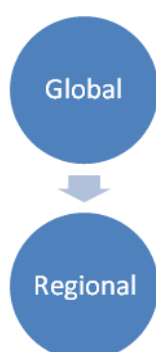
This joint-Regional Commission report outlines key priorities for the post-2015 agenda from a regional perspective. All four regions prioritize economic diversification and employment, inclusion and social protection and the building of resilience to economic and environmental shocks. They all stress the importance of democracy, accountability, human rights, peace, security and conflict resolution, and the need to re-examine international governance mechanisms. The *four key priorities* for all regions are: i) productive employment and decent work generation; ii) tackling inequality; iii) environmental sustainability; and iv) democratic governance.

### UN Development Group's Arab Development Forum, Amman April 2013<sup>35</sup>

These consultations reflected that areas which were at the heart of the Millennium Declaration need to be included in the next global framework: governance issues such as voice and participation; issues related to peace, security and national self-determination; and a fuller embrace of gender equality and women's empowerment. They also highlighted the need for partnerships and financing for development to be better captured through a future development framework, with a broader range of partners. Regional cooperation was also seen as a key driver of development that should be emphasised. With regard to principles for the post-2015 agenda, the meeting highlighted five values of particular importance for the Arab region: *equity, resilience, sustainability, accountability and participation*.

### Arab Regional Implementation Meeting, Dubai May 2013<sup>36</sup>

Some of the key messages stemming from these discussions included that the SDGs should balance the three pillars of sustainable development, consider the Rio Principles (in particular common but differentiated responsibilities) and be supported by adequate means of implementation including finance, technology and capacity building. Further, the SDGs should be clear, measurable and science-based and allow for assessment of progress towards sustainable development, with a continued focus on completing the implementation of the MDGs. The SDGs should also take into account the capacities, policies and national priorities of States, with due consideration given to international peace and security, poverty eradication, and the sectors of food, energy, and water, amongst others.



*Based on this review, it is proposed that key priorities and principles for the Arab region for the SDGs and post-2015 framework include:*

#### **Regional Principles**

- *Peace and security, ending occupation, national sovereignty over natural resources.*
- *Effective governance: democracy, accountability, voice and participation, and the rule of law.*

<sup>31</sup> UNTT (2012)

<sup>32</sup> High Level Panel of Eminent Persons (HLP) (2013) *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development*, <http://www.post2015hlp.org/the-report/>

<sup>33</sup> UNDP and UNEP (2013) *Breaking Down the Silos: Integrating Environmental Sustainability in the Post-2015 Agenda*, report of the thematic consultation on environmental sustainability & post-2015, <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/sustainability2015report>

<sup>34</sup> UN Regional Commissions (2013) *A Regional Perspective on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda*, <http://www.regionalcommissions.org/post2015regionalreport.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> See report at: [http://www.undg.org/docs/13095/ADF%20short-web\\_1406.pdf](http://www.undg.org/docs/13095/ADF%20short-web_1406.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> See documents at: <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=2044E>

- *Sustainability and resilience: Rio Principles, including common but differentiated responsibilities, sustainable consumption and production, resource efficiency, intergenerational equity, as well as planetary boundaries.*
- *Human rights: freedom, justice, access, opportunity, equity, gender equality and women's empowerment (as agreed under international law).*
- *Integration: balanced across three dimensions of sustainable development, clear, measurable and science-based.*

**Regional priorities:**

- *Continued commitment to the achievement of the MDGs and poverty eradication as an overarching goal.*
- *Governance and participation deficits – the need for reforms to uphold human rights, participatory decision-making and people's dignity (and the need for a global governance goal, targets and indicators).*
- *Inequalities in the distribution of development gains and achievement of quality growth – the need to better capture and address national and sub-national inequalities as well as measurements of poverty and economic exclusion.*
- *The need for economic diversification, job creation and economic inclusion.*
- *Building resilience to economic, social and environmental shocks (including climate change), including through poverty eradication; energy, water and food security; adequate provision of basic services; and social protection.*
- *An increased role for regional cooperation and integration.*
- *A new global partnership and governance mechanism for development with a broader range of partners, and underpinned by adequate means of implementation including finance, technology and capacity building.*

## B. Discussion on Key SDG Conceptual Issues

---

In formulating the SDGs, the international community will need to effectively address a range of key *conceptual issues* that would lead to a truly transformative international agenda. This will include:

- Achieving a universal agenda that is owned by national governments and provides a flexible global framework that works for all countries;
- Effectively integrating environmental, social and economic considerations in a balanced way and bridging the science-policy interface; and
- Establishing a new global partnership which embeds the SDGs in an effective governance framework with adequate means of implementation and an accountability mechanism.

These conceptual issues are closely related to some of the key weaknesses of the MDG framework that will need to be addressed by the SDG framework. They will be fundamental in the negotiations on the SDGs, and as such they provide an important point of leverage for an Arab regional perspective that can help to shape

the outcome. This section of the paper will explore in greater detail the three key conceptual issues outlined above and highlight perspectives and priorities for consideration by the Arab region.

## 1. SDGs that are universal and yet cater for national diversity in the Arab region

*“We are all agreed on the universality of the SDGs, but we may have different understandings of how that should be reflected in the goals”<sup>37</sup>*

One of the criticisms of the MDGs was that they were global in nature but were not universally applicable to all countries. Further, they were not sufficiently tailored to regional and national contexts and distorted national priorities. Despite their high profile, the MDGs were not effective planning tools – their ‘one-size-fits-all’ targets meant that different countries could not use them as the basis for national policies.

In response to these shortcomings, there is now wide support for a single post-2015 development framework containing a single set of goals that are universally applicable to all countries but adaptable to different national realities and priorities. The OWG has highlighted that the SDGs must be universal but also flexible enough to ensure ownership by countries with different levels of development and national priorities.<sup>38</sup> There are enormous differences among countries in terms of resources, capabilities, and responsibility for global environmental problems. The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) embedded in many global agreements provides a useful framework for agreeing on goals that allow individual countries to comply at a different pace using different targets and timelines for implementation.

In addition to being a universal agenda, the SDGs will need to be more relevant for national policy making by allowing countries to identify differentiated targets that can be tailored to specific national development situations. Generic goals may function best as an overall ‘compass’ against which countries could align development priorities. However, to guide planning and policy making, global goals need to be elaborated by national-level targets and indicators.<sup>39</sup> This approach of “global goals and national targets” would allow countries to set targets most relevant to them, such as reducing particular sub-national disparities or closing gaps in governance. This will be an important consideration for the Arab region given the considerable diversity among Arab countries in terms of their capacities and priorities.

However, there will inevitably be tradeoffs between universality and flexibility – between a top-down and bottom-up approach. Greater flexibility (or a bottom-up approach) will enable greater national ownership and enhance implementation, but will affect the ability to aggregate targets and indicators, to make comparisons, and monitor regional and global progress. Conversely, greater global consistency between targets (or a top-down approach) would create greater regional and global coherence and better enhance comparability and aggregation and measurement of progress. However, it may require significant time to negotiate and reach consensus on targets, and such targets may not be as useful for national planning purposes. Further, the number of different targets would have to be limited (e.g. to 3 options) if aggregation and comparability are to be ensured. This conceptual issue has garnered much interest in global negotiations and processes as well as in the research community, with some innovative proposals put forward (see **Box 3**).

<sup>37</sup> Open Working Group (OWG) on SDGs (2013) *Progress Report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on SDGs*, A/67/941, [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/67/941&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/67/941&Lang=E)

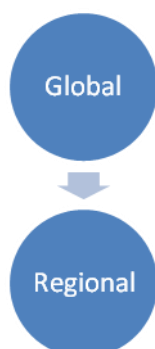
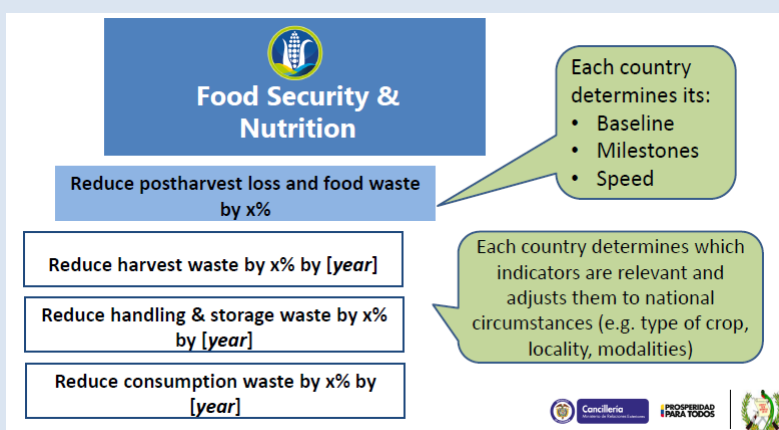
<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Miyazawa and Hoiberg Olsen S (2013) *MDGs: What worked well and what should new SDGs do differently?*, article from the Independent Research Forum, <http://www.irf2015.org/millennium-development-goals-what-worked-well-and-what-should-new-sustainable-development-goals-do>

### Box 3: A Dashboard Approach to Goals and Targets<sup>40</sup>

Advocating a balance between a top-down and bottom-up approach, the governments of Colombia and Guatemala in June 2013 proposed a “Dashboard Approach” to the post-2015 development agenda, which comprises a consistent set of common global goals measured by a core set of internationally agreed-upon targets and indicators. Each country would determine the *speed* and *level* for each target and which targets and indicators are relevant according to their national circumstances (e.g. increase efficiency by X% by year 20YY – see figure below). Such generic or “template” targets would be negotiated and agreed to in regional and global arenas, which would provide consistency and allow targets to be aggregated afterwards and used as input to regional and global monitoring processes. Such an approach was also adopted by the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons in their recent report to the Secretary-General.

In addition, countries could define additional national targets and/or indicators that would be complementary to the global framework. Apart from enhancing cooperation, capacity building, and the exchange of experiences, this design would also contribute to improved comparability and aggregation as well as to greater coherence between the different levels.



*The question of how to combine a universal framework with nationally-relevant targets is a key conceptual issue that should be considered by Arab stakeholders to ensure that the global outcome works for the Arab region. Given the great level of diversity between Arab countries and differing national circumstances and priorities, the following perspectives are proposed for consideration by Arab governments:*

- *The SDGs should be both universal and flexible and balance a top-down and bottom-up approach – i.e. goals should be formulated sufficiently broad so that they are relevant for all countries but allow for differentiation in targets and indicators in accordance with national circumstances.*
- *Prioritisation of the SDGs should be left to individual countries which will assess their own stage of development, their key development gaps, the extent to which they can deal with those gaps, and the socio-economic development objectives they have set out in their own national development strategies.*
- *Equity considerations in the articulation of goals and targets should be guided by the principle of CBDR<sup>41</sup>.*
- *The framework should allow for national target-setting but it should also facilitate aggregation of data for monitoring and measurability purposes at the regional and global levels. The ‘dashboard’ approach would provide a suitable option for achieving this balance, provided that the targets included in the dashboard were limited in number and negotiated and agreed to by governments to ensure their relevance for national policy making.*

<sup>40</sup> See proposal at: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/envaccounting/ceea/meetings/UNCCEA-8-5a.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> Common but differentiated responsibilities.

- *There may also be scope for regional or sub-regional negotiations on the selection of targets that are meaningful for groups of Arab countries. Negotiations at this regional level may be easier and enable regional data aggregation and comparison. Further, wealthier countries in the region may choose to demonstrate a leadership role in adopting ambitious targets, developing solutions and testing new technologies that deliver sustainable development outcomes. They can also assist poorer countries in the region in their sustainable development efforts.*

## **2. Addressing the science-policy interface: an SDG framework that effectively integrates the three dimensions of sustainable development**

*“It is crucial that human development imperatives and sustainable development imperatives are brought together in a powerful, internally-consistent and synergistic development framework”<sup>42</sup>*

The relationship between development and environment has not been favourable in the past because the price for a higher standard of living has been the steady depletion of natural resources and increasing environmental impact.<sup>43</sup> While new renewable and more efficient technologies and processes are beginning to address these issues, major global scientific assessments<sup>44</sup> highlight that in the past 50 years humans have changed ecosystems more rapidly and extensively than in any comparable period in history, supporting arguments that we have now entered a new age of human influence over the planet known as the “Anthropocene”. While significant progress has been achieved over the past decade towards the MDGs, progress has not been homogenous or equitable, and the advent of recent climate, energy, food and financial crises has raised questions regarding the capacity of the Earth to continue to absorb the impacts of human development. Recent scientific developments highlight that we have already crossed three out of nine critical planetary boundaries which define a safe operating space for humanity.<sup>45</sup> While progress has been made, it has not been sustainable and a key challenge for the SDGs will be to ‘decouple’ socio-economic development from the overuse of resources and growing environmental degradation. This will require the global community to adopt sustainable and equitable resource exploitation, change consumption and production patterns, and transform economies so that they are low carbon, resource efficient and resilient (often referred to as ‘green economies’).

There are clear signs of this challenge in the Arab region. While significant progress has been made on the MDGs, recent political and other crises highlight deficiencies that are not adequately captured by the MDG framework. Governance and participation deficits, inequalities in the distribution of development gains, and growing natural resource scarcities increase the region’s vulnerability to economic, social and environmental shocks and jeopardise development gains that have been made over the last 10 years.

The main focus of the MDG framework was to reduce poverty and improve the lives of the world’s poorest people. It is widely agreed that eradicating poverty and improving human wellbeing should remain the central focus in the post-2015 framework. However, there is also a strong recognition that a truly transformative agenda is needed that will put in place the building blocks of sustained prosperity for all based on the principles of human rights, equality and sustainability.<sup>46</sup> In this context, it is crucial that human development

<sup>42</sup> UN Regional Commissions (2013)

<sup>43</sup> UNDP and UNEP (2013)

<sup>44</sup> UNEP (2005) Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Report, available at: <http://www.unep.org/maweb/en/index.aspx>; UNEP (2012) Global Environment Outlook – GEO5, <http://www.unep.org/geo/geo5.asp>

<sup>45</sup> Rockstrom et al (2009) “A Safe Operating Space for Humanity”, *Nature* 461, 24 September 2009, <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v461/n7263/full/461472a.html>.

<sup>46</sup> HLP (2013); UNTT (2012)

imperatives and sustainable development imperatives are brought together in a powerful, internally-consistent and synergistic development framework.<sup>47</sup>

Reflections on the MDGs and specifically on MDG-7 have highlighted the poor integration of poverty reduction and environmental sustainability in the MDG framework which created a false sense of competition between environmental and poverty objectives. For example, MDG-7 addressed a very limited range of environmental sustainability issues, it lacked inter-linkages with other MDGs, and focused largely on ‘changes in state’ of the environment rather than the driving forces behind these changes. As a result, environmental sustainability has generally operated in a silo with little relationship to the root causes of poverty. The limited targets that were adopted are criticised as being vague and difficult to measure and have made it difficult for governments to find solutions. Despite some positive trends for MDG-7, insufficient progress has been made on most targets. The failure to frame environmental sustainability as a poverty issue is arguably a critical factor in subsequent failures in MDG-7 monitoring, reporting and results.<sup>48</sup>

The post-2015 development agenda provides the opportunity to follow-up the unfinished business of MDG-7 by combining the two greatest challenges of our age – meeting the needs and aspirations of people around the world while protecting the natural resources on which human life depends.<sup>49</sup> To do so, it will need to bridge the science-policy divide.

### 2.1 Bridging the Science-Policy Interface through Integration

The key theme that binds human development and environmental sustainability is the concept of “integrated development”. For twenty years, the international community, including the Arab region, has aspired to integrate the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainability, but no country has yet achieved this.<sup>50</sup> The post-2015 framework provides an opportunity to finally address this gap and put to rest the futile debates that pit one dimension of sustainable development against another.<sup>51</sup>

Over the last year, a plethora of UN bodies, policy analysts, advocacy organizations, and research groups have proposed a variety of different ways in which to integrate poverty eradication with environmental sustainability. For example, some propose a limited extension of the MDGs framework, others propose to set goals and targets within each of the three dimensions and then assess their inter-linkages, while others try to build all three dimensions into the main architecture of the goals themselves. The approach of integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development into each goal, for example through integrated targets, is garnering significant interest and support (see examples of proposals in **Box 4**).

#### Box 4: Innovative Approaches for Integrated SDGs

##### 1. A Safe and Just Space for Humanity<sup>52</sup>

An early proposal for integrating the science-policy interface outlined a dual framework that was inspired by the so-called ‘nine planetary boundaries’ based on critical Earth system processes and which constitute an environmental ceiling (or a ‘safe operating space for humanity’) above which occurs unacceptable environmental change. The proposal then combines these boundaries with 11 social foundations below which lies unacceptable human deprivation, and which are largely based on human rights. Between the planetary ceiling and the social foundation lies an area – shaped like a doughnut – which is the ‘safe and just operating space for humanity’ (see figure below).

<sup>47</sup> UN Regional Commissions (2013)

<sup>48</sup> UNDP and UNEP (2013)

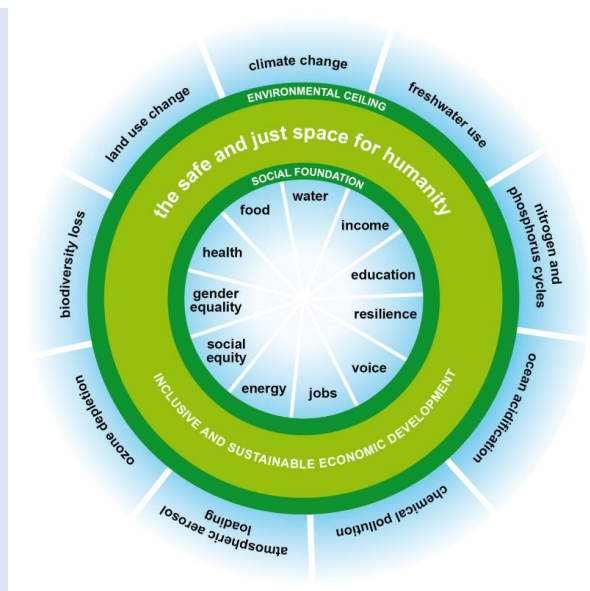
<sup>49</sup> Melamed C and Ladd P (2013) *How to build sustainable development goals: integrating human development and environmental sustainability in a new global agenda*, Overseas Development Institute and UNDP, <http://www.odi.org.uk/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8290.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> OWG (2013b) *SDGs Issues Brief: Energy*, prepared for the Open Working Group on SDGs October 2013, <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1729tstissuesconceptual2.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2013) *An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development: Report for the UN Secretary-General*, <http://unsdsn.org/files/2013/06/130613-SDSN-An-Action-Agenda-for-Sustainable-Development-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> Raworth K (2012) *A Safe and Just Space for Humanity*, Oxfam, <http://www.oxfam.org/en/grow/policy/safe-and-just-space-humanity>





## 2. SDGs: Integrating Human Development and Environmental Sustainability<sup>53</sup>

This research paper proposes an integrated framework based around three types of goals: (i) human development goals with little environmental impact associated with their attainment (e.g. education, healthcare) which should be based largely on social and economic targets; (ii) human development goals with important environmental dimensions and larger impacts (e.g. food, energy, water) which should integrate social, economic and environmental targets; and (iii) goals related to common management of global resources and public goods, which should include global targets.

## 3. Embedding Environment in the SDGs<sup>54</sup>

This discussion paper from UNEP outlines an integrated framework for embedding environment in the SDGs. The integrated approach for embedding environment in goals and targets proposes:

- Complementary set of goals and targets which are reinforcing and cover all of the main objectives of the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainable development.
- Integrated goals – the top level of the SDGs should be filled with a limited number of integrated goals that are simple to understand, but not necessarily simple in nature. Goals should embody all three aspects of sustainable development – environmental, social and economic.
- Mix of targets – each of the integrated goals should be underpinned by a mix of targets – some integrated, and some ‘non-integrated’ in the sense that they concentrate on environmental, social or economic objectives.

## 4. Towards an Integrated Framework for SDGs<sup>55</sup>

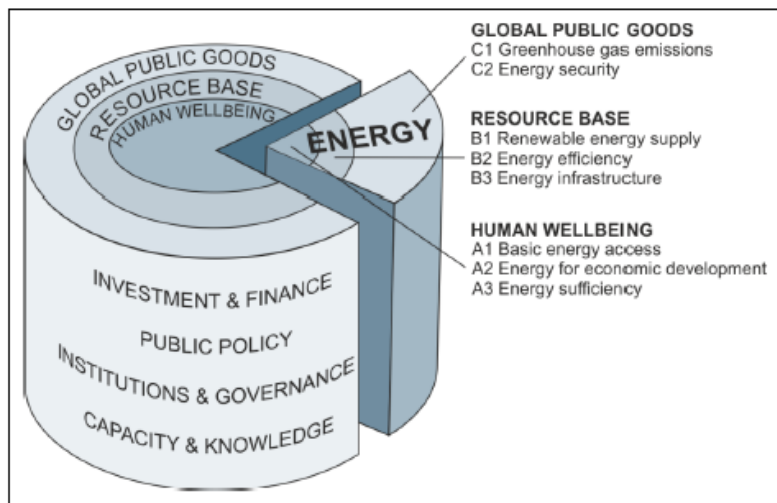
This research paper develops a generic integrated framework for SDGs based on a three-tiered approach for structuring each goal, along with the integration of enabling goals. The three-tiered approach places human wellbeing at the centre of the agenda, with the supporting resource base upon which development relies and global public goods forming additional tiers. Based on this approach, targets for each thematic goal would be structured to focus initially on human wellbeing outcomes, and then link these outcomes with the surrounding resource base by ensuring sustainable exploitation and resource efficiency enhancement. Each goal would also consider the functions of the global society that require conscious coordination and action at the international level (i.e. public goods that manifest at the global scale, such as the climate, ozone layer, and oceans, as well as global security and the stability of commodity markets). This three-tiered framework would provide an intuitive approach to integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development that recognises the importance of securing human wellbeing outcomes as well as transforming the drivers of environmental change. In addition, a complementary set of enabling goals are suggested with four layers: capacity and knowledge; institutions and governance; public policy; and investment and finance. An example is given for a goal on energy (see figure below).

<sup>53</sup> Melamed C and Ladd P (2013): [http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/859melaned\\_paper.pdf](http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/859melaned_paper.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> UNEP (2013) *Embedding the Environment in SDGs*, [http://www.unep.org/pdf/UNEP\\_Post\\_2015\\_Discussion\\_Paper\\_1\\_\(Version2\).pdf](http://www.unep.org/pdf/UNEP_Post_2015_Discussion_Paper_1_(Version2).pdf)

<sup>55</sup> Nilsson N, Lucas P and Yoshida T (2013) *Towards an Integrated Framework for SDGs: Ultimate and Enabling Goals for the Case of Energy*, in “Sustainability” 2013/5/4124-51, <http://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/5/10/4124>





### 5. Hybrid Approach for Energy – A ‘Silo’ Goal Plus Integrated Targets<sup>56</sup>

This paper provides a summary of different proposals for a goal on energy, which vary from a ‘standalone’ energy goal to the integration of energy across other goals. For example, the objectives of the Sustainable Energy for All (SE4A) initiative could form the basis for three targets for a global goal, relating to energy access, energy efficiency, and renewable energy. Alternatively, the European Commission proposes ‘clusters’ of four issues which could provide the basis for the goals, with energy included within a goal for ‘promoting the drivers for inclusive and sustainable growth’. The paper then proposes that the way forward could take the shape of a specific SDG on energy, with targets inspired by SE4A. This could be supplemented by integrating energy-related targets or indicators as relevant into other goals, in particular those relating to food, water, health and gender. Finally, the paper proposes that to design an SDG framework whose goals, targets and indicators respond meaningfully to multifaceted challenges should embrace the following characteristics: (1) Strong linkages between energy and other sustainable development goals; (2) Decoupling of socio-economic development from escalating resource use, fossil-fuel dependency and environmental degradation; and (3) Scientific monitoring and verification.

The approach of developing goals with integrated social, environmental and economic targets would encourage governments and other institutions to move away from the ‘silo’ approach to solving challenges of sustainable development.<sup>57</sup> However, a challenge for developing such an integrated framework will be finding an intuitive, simple and meaningful way to integrate the three dimensions, and avoid the situation where we include every issue into every goal, which would lead to great complexity and duplication. One of the key successes of the MDG framework was that it was simple to understand and implement. There is therefore a need to strike a balance between integration, simplicity and duplicity.

The Arab region has highlighted that ‘integration’ and ‘resilience’ should be some of the key guiding principles for the SDG framework which should help to overcome the science-policy divide and silo-based approach to managing inter-linked regional challenges. However, the integration of the various dimensions of sustainable development into each goal and across goals to arrive at a cohesive and comprehensive framework that drives transformative change is not an easy task. Drawing from the various proposals in [Box 4](#) above, some key lessons would be:

- The need to focus on human well-being outcomes at the core of the framework, based upon fundamental human rights as agreed under international law;
- The need to acknowledge the inter-linkages between human wellbeing and the resource base – i.e. that achieving some human well-being outcomes (e.g. access to water, food, energy) will depend upon, and have significant implications for, the natural resource base. However, other human wellbeing outcomes (e.g. education) might have limited natural resource and environmental implications;

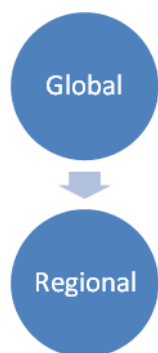
<sup>56</sup> UNTST (2113c)

<sup>57</sup> UNEP (2013)

- For wellbeing outcomes to be resilient over time, we need to recognise that there are global limitations to resource consumption and that countries will need to work together to ensure long-term viability and stability of the planet (including both Earth's natural systems such as its climate, as well as human systems such as global security, financial systems, commodity markets);
- That achieving human wellbeing for all people while maintaining a sustainable and resilient resource base within global limits will require us to transform our economies and address key drivers of environmental change, including through sustainable and equitable exploitation of the natural resource base, sustainable consumption and production patterns, greater resource efficiency, and new technologies and alternative resources – in other words, the achievement of human wellbeing outcomes through economic development needs to be 'decoupled' from environmental decline.

Ultimately, further discussion within the OWG is needed on how to best balance the three dimensions of sustainable development in the SDGs framework. In this context, the Arab region should promote an effective approach for integrated goals and targets. The key aspects outlined above could provide a framework or guideline for formulating integrated targets for each goal that address the social, economic and environmental dimensions and balance simplicity, integration, and avoiding duplication.

Further, given the importance of governance considerations for the Arab region, any integrated framework that serves the Arab region would also need to effectively integrate governance into the overall framework. Several recent global reports on the SDGs have recognised the importance of governance in the post-2015 framework, and have therefore proposed that governance form a "fourth dimension" of sustainable development.<sup>58</sup> However, governance targets are likely to be universally relevant across all of the thematic goals, and as such the best approach may be to address governance as a separate, stand-alone goal using international standards. Nevertheless, there may also be scope to integrate governance targets or indicators across thematic goals where particularly relevant or appropriate (e.g. institutional reforms or policy settings).



*The question of how to bridge the science-policy interface and integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development (as well as the 'governance' dimension) is an important conceptual issue for consideration by the Arab region. With regard to this key conceptual issue, the following perspectives are proposed for consideration by the region:*

- *The SDG framework should bridge the science-policy interface and shape a transformative agenda – it should ensure human wellbeing for all Arab peoples that is sustainable and resilient in the long term.*
- *To do so, it should address a broader range of issues than those considered by the MDGs and enhance integration. To better address environmental sustainability issues, the framework should include goals relating to key environmental and resource challenges facing the region – in particular food, water and energy security.*
- *Learning from the lessons with MDG-7, the SDGs should integrate the social, economic and environmental dimensions and should not treat them as separate 'pillars', each requiring their own set of discrete goals.*
- *Integration would be enhanced by integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development into each goal through integrated targets – however, integrated targets across all three dimensions will not be required or appropriate in all cases, and the approach should aim to*

<sup>58</sup> UN Regional Commissions (2013); UNTT (2012); HLP (2013); SDSN (2013).

*enhance integration and mutual reinforcement, while balancing simplicity and avoiding duplication.*

- *This integration could be achieved in each goal by focusing on a series of outcomes and drivers: firstly, on achieving human wellbeing outcomes in accordance with human rights; secondly, by linking these outcomes with the need to ensure a sustainable resource base; thirdly, by ensuring that these outcomes are sustainable and resilient in the long-term through international cooperation on global stability and effective management of global public goods. By identifying drivers, this approach would also facilitate the identification of solutions and national policy making.*
- *Finally, the SDGs should also integrate a “fourth dimension” of sustainable development which is critical for the Arab region – i.e. governance. This would most likely work best as a separate, standalone goal, but could also be integrated across other goals through related targets and indicators, as appropriate. As a key enabler, governance should also be linked to the means of implementation.*

### **3. A New Global Partnership for Sustainable Development: addressing means of implementation and accountability and follow-up.**

*“It is time for the international community to use new ways of working, to go beyond an aid agenda and put its own house in order”<sup>59</sup>*

Beyond an agreed set of global goals, the post-2015 agenda needs a clear, compelling and unifying vision, agreed means of implementation commensurate with the challenges at hand, and a participatory monitoring system to improve the quality and availability of information and to ensure transparency and accountability.<sup>60</sup> While the global discourse to date has tended to focus on the ‘goals’ themselves, a truly transformative post-2015 agenda will require a more robust and comprehensive framework capable of translating aspirations into change on the ground in the Arab region. In this context, it is widely agreed that in order to be effective, the post-2015 framework will need to be backed up by strong commitments on means of implementation and an accountability mechanism that form a true global partnership.<sup>61</sup> This would require greater global cooperation and mechanisms, as well as greater Arab regional cooperation and regional accountability mechanisms.

#### **3.1 MDG-8: addressing weaknesses in the global partnership**

Developing countries in the Arab region will require external support to implement the SDGs and means of implementation must be given due consideration in the development of the new framework. The notion of ‘means of implementation’ describes the interdependent mix of financial resources, technology development and transfer, capacity building, inclusive and equitable globalization and trade, and regional integration.<sup>62</sup> Related to these means of implementation are other enablers such as well as the creation of national and regional enabling environments through effective governance and institutions and policy settings.

At the global level, the concept of ‘partnership’ has been used for many decades to describe a compact for promoting development through various means of implementation. The current global partnership for

---

<sup>59</sup> HLP (2013)

<sup>60</sup> UN Secretary-General (2013) *A life of dignity for all: accelerating progress towards the MDGs and advancing the UN development agenda beyond 2015*, Report of the Secretary-General, 26 July 2013 A/68/150, <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/A%20Life%20of%20Dignity%20for%20All.pdf>

<sup>61</sup> UN TST (2013c) *SDGs Issues Brief: Means of Implementation; Global Partnership for Achieving Sustainable Development*, [http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2079Issues%20Brief%20Means%20of%20Implementation%20Final\\_TST\\_141013.pdf](http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2079Issues%20Brief%20Means%20of%20Implementation%20Final_TST_141013.pdf)

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

development (MDG-8) was developed to complement and enable the other MDGs and has played a central role in increasing attention to fulfilling aid targets, increasing the focus on special needs of vulnerable countries, improving market access, providing debt relief, and increasing access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) and essential medicines.

However, MDG-8 has also been criticised due to several shortcomings, including its failure to recognise human rights and sustainable development principles, the discrepancy between its level of ambition and actual implementation, its lack of integration with implementation of other MDGs, the lack of mechanisms for evaluation and review, its perpetuation of the 'donor-recipient' type of relationship, and lack of attention to development financing and cooperation beyond aid. MDG-8 therefore fell well short of being the vehicle for implementing, evaluating and reporting on all of the MDGs.

For instance, progress against targets for ODA has fallen short of the commitment by donor countries in MDG-8 to disburse 0.7 percent of their GNI. Recent declining trends in ODA underscore that aid money will not be enough to achieve the MDGs, let alone a broader suite of SDGs. While Arab donors have been more generous to the Arab world, their share of ODA as a percentage of GNI has also been declining, despite the establishment of several national development funds in the region.<sup>63</sup> Additional resources will be needed from both domestic resource mobilisation (particularly for middle-income countries) as well as from the private sector and other sources to meet the finance and investment needs of the SDGs.

The OWG has made it clear that new thinking on international cooperation beyond the traditional donor-recipient relationship is needed.<sup>64</sup> This underscores the need for clear commitments and collaboration with a wide range of actors working together in new combinations - whether through multi-stakeholder partnerships, strengthened south-south cooperation, or other forms of collaboration. It is time for the private sector to become a real partner in tackling poverty reduction and sustainable development challenges – both as a driver for delivering and scaling-up development outcomes and as an advocate for development policies and investment.

Looking beyond 2015, a new partnership based on mutual respect, transparency, good governance and accountability should bring together diverse actors in the service of inclusive development, including governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, youth and women's groups, religious organizations, international and regional organizations and foundations.<sup>65</sup>

### **3.2 A New and Strengthened Global Partnership for the SDGs**

Partnerships have become an increasingly important tool for the UN system, with the Sustainable Energy for All initiative and the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation as good examples. However, while multi-stakeholder partnerships have proven successful in mobilizing resources more efficiently for their set purpose and have also helped to build consensus around controversial issues, they have a poor track record of promoting systemic change and can result in a greater fragmentation of financing due to their ad-hoc nature.<sup>66</sup>

Within the SDG framework, the creation of a new global partnership presents several conceptual challenges. For example, whether the means of implementation and partnerships are considered as a separate goal (as with MDG-8), or integrated as part of each newly defined SDG – or both. In this regard, the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons recommends that dynamic, multi-stakeholder partnerships be included in each thematic

---

<sup>63</sup> UN and LAS (2013)

<sup>64</sup> OWG (2013)

<sup>65</sup> UN and LAS (2013)

<sup>66</sup> UNTST (2013c)

area – at national, regional and global levels.<sup>67</sup> Such an approach could take a similar format to the Sustainable Energy for All Initiative, building partnerships into each goal. Targets could be formulated in a way that describe how the goals will be implemented at international, regional and national levels, outlining an effective package of enablers or means of implementation that best serves each SDG. Partnership targets included in each goal could specify global contributions towards implementation (e.g. relating to finance and investment; policy settings; governance and institutions; and knowledge and capacity). Calls for greater cooperation and integration in the Arab region as well as for greater engagement with civil society and other major groups provide an opportunity for new regional partnerships to support each SDG. An integrated SDG framework that adopts this type of innovative approach is described further in **Box 5** below.

At the end of the day, the SDGs will amount to nothing without implementation. As such, it may be preferable to have separate and dedicated goals on partnerships and means of implementation, along with partnership and means of implementation targets in each thematic goal. This more comprehensive approach appears to be preferred by the South Centre (see **Box 5**).

#### **Box 5: Proposals for Enhancing Mol and Strengthening Global Partnerships Towards an Integrated Framework for SDGs<sup>68</sup>**

This proposal (outlined in **Box 4** above) also includes a set of enabling goals which provide the basis for implementation of thematic goals. The proposal comprises four goals that need to be included in an SDG framework, which integrate means of implementation and governance enablers: (1) The first level focuses on *building human capacity*, through the development and transmission of knowledge; (2) Building on this capacity, societies must ensure that *governance and institutional frameworks* are set in place so that people are empowered to draw upon those capacities in the pursuit of their wellbeing and freedom; (3) This institutional basis provides the source of agency, power and legitimacy for the supportive state which promotes the attainment of goals through public coordination and interventions through *public policies*; and (4) These policies and institutions in turn will enable and direct efforts of implementation, and in particular the *investments* needed in different development sectors, and the financing arrangements for these investments.

#### **Elements of a Strengthened Partnership<sup>69</sup>**

An integrated global partnership with effective means of implementation and strong accountability mechanisms could best enable the post-2015 agenda and respond to global challenges such as poverty eradication, food security, gender inequality and climate change, among others. A renewed and strengthened global partnership for mobilizing the means of implementation needs to (i) address the social, economic and environmental dimensions in an integrated manner; (ii) build on existing commitments and governance structures, ensuring that new initiatives reinforce previous successes; (iii) reinforce coherence in the implementation of a universal post-2015 agenda, leveraging resources across diverse funding mechanisms; and (iv) strengthen governance and accountability frameworks, providing for multi-stakeholder engagement, including for financing, technology innovation and diffusion, and capacity building for people and institutions.

#### **SDG Structure for Strengthened Means of Implementation<sup>70</sup>**

Means of implementation feature strongly in the proposed structure of the SDGs framework published by the South Centre, which comprises four components:

1. Principles and modalities for the SDGs;
2. Goals, targets and actions at the level of the international system – a more elaborate and systematic MDG-8, not necessarily categorised as economic, social or environmental.
3. Sections on Economic, Social, and Environmental Goals – an equal number for each pillar, with differentiation between developed and developing country goals and targets. For each goal pertaining to developing countries: (a) the goal; (b) the international factors or targets that have to be established or reformed or removed in order to enable the developing countries' goals and targets to be met, including provision of sufficient policy space for national development; (c) national sub-goals or targets; and (d) means of implementation (finance, technology)

<sup>67</sup> HLP (2013)

<sup>68</sup> Nilsson et al (2013)

<sup>69</sup> UNTST (2013c)

<sup>70</sup> South Centre (2013) *Concept Paper by the South Centre on SDGs*,

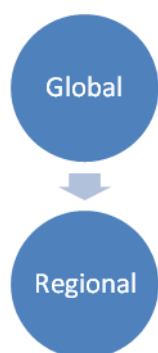
<http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1691SC%20Concept%20Paper%20on%20SDGs%20%202010.3.13%20with%20SC%20head.pdf>



required by developing countries.

A general section on means of implementation (especially financial resources and technology transfer and development).

The Arab region has underscored the need for a strengthened global partnership to form a key component of the SDGs framework, as well as the need for enhanced regional cooperation. As such, the question of how best to formulate a new global and regional partnership for the SDGs is a critical conceptual issue that should be considered by the region. Experience with the MDGs and sustainable development in the region has underscored the need for engagement with a broader range of partners as well as clear provisions for means of implementation including finance, technology and capacity building. The need for governance and institutional reforms is an important related priority for the region that should form part of the enabling environment for the SDGs.



*In this context, the following perspectives on the conceptualisation of a new global partnership for the SDGs are proposed for consideration by the Arab region:*

- The SDG framework will need to be backed by a new global partnership that provides the necessary means of implementation to support a transformative agenda.*
- The global partnership would need to target the traditional means of implementation for the SDGs, in particular finance and investment, technology and capacity building. However, these would also need to be linked to other governance-related enablers, in particular effective institutions and policy settings, as well as effective accountability mechanisms.*
- Integrated partnership targets for the means of implementation should be built into each thematic goal and support the formation of dynamic, multi-stakeholder partnerships around priority thematic issues. This would include targets relating to goal-specific means of implementation, as relevant. Partnerships should aim to catalyse action from a broad range of stakeholders at the global, regional and national levels. As such, the region should explore opportunities for regional partnerships with a broad range of stakeholders.*
- Given their critical importance for the Arab region, global stand-alone goals on means of implementation should also be considered, addressing each of the key means of implementation: finance, technology and capacity building. In addition, there is a need for a governance goal, targets and indicators that facilitate reforms to uphold human rights, participatory decision-making, democratic governance and the rule of law, as well as appropriate policy settings. These standalone goals could be considered the SDG 'enablers' and would need to be designed to avoid duplication and ensure consistency among partnership and governance targets across the various goals.*

### **3.3 Accountability Mechanisms for Implementation & Measuring Progress**

A lesson learned from the MDGs and other global goals is the need for the global partnership to include a broad-based, inclusive monitoring mechanism for regular reporting on progress and accountability and follow-up. For the SDGs to be effective, they will need to be embedded in effective governance regimes at the global, regional, national and sub-national levels that ensure such accountability and follow-up. As such, in addition to means of implementation and governance provisions, the new global partnership will also require strong accountability mechanisms at all levels.

The new global partnership will also need to overcome the institutional and accountability barriers that have plagued sustainable development for the past 20 years, including in the Arab region. In particular, a major

problem has been the segregation of priority issues into silos with sustainable development primarily viewed as an environmental issue. The global partnership will also therefore need to address global, regional and national institutional frameworks that bridge the gaps between silos and bring the full range of actors together in partnerships at all levels.

The UN will play a critical role in providing global and regional accountability mechanisms through appropriate regional and global platforms and regular monitoring and review processes. National governments will have the lead in coordinating implementation and monitoring national progress on the SDGs. However, a range of stakeholders will need to be engaged in these efforts at all levels, including the private sector, non-government organisations and civil society to ensure that they are both accountable and transparent.

### **3.3.1 Global Accountability Mechanism**

At the global level, the new High Level Political Forum (HLPF) for sustainable development is likely to play the lead role in monitoring progress on the SDGs and supporting a renewed global partnership. Regular reviews on the follow-up and implementation of sustainable development commitments are to commence in 2016 and will be an important role of the HLPF. This could include a review not only of sustainable development progress by countries but also provide an accountability mechanism for the fulfilment of commitments with regard to means of implementation. This review process will also be more transparent through the effective participation of civil society, the private sector, the media and other relevant stakeholders who can significantly strengthen the delivery of the global partnership and be important for the success of the HLPF. The Global Sustainable Development report which was an additional outcome requested by governments at Rio+20, could provide an important input to the meeting by analyzing global pathways towards goals and reviewing progress. In addition, a specific UN organisation could be named responsible for coordinating implementation of each specific goal. This would enhance coordination of efforts across the UN, assist with monitoring progress, and provide for greater accountability.

### **3.3.2 Regional Accountability Mechanism**

At the regional level, regional preparatory meetings are planned to take place prior to each session of the HLPF. In the past, regional meetings under the former Commission on Sustainable Development have been coordinated by ESCWA in partnership with the League of Arab States (LAS)<sup>71</sup> and UNEP, and they have been linked loosely to the regional institutional framework provided by LAS. However, they have had several shortcomings in that they largely focused on environmental issues, targeted environmental ministries and experts, did not provide an effective forum for monitoring progress and accountability, and did not link with regional processes for implementing and monitoring progress on MDGs and social and economic issues.

It will be important that the SDGs also have an 'anchor institution' at the regional level that links with both the global and national levels, and provides a platform for SDG implementation, monitoring of progress, national reviews and sharing of experiences, and accountability. The proposed regional meetings under the framework of the HLPF should provide this regional platform. However, to be effective, such meetings will need to link closely with the regional economic, social and environmental institutional framework provided through LAS (in particular the Economic and Social Council and Summits and the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment) to attract high-level participation of Ministers across relevant portfolios as well as Heads of State. Sustainable development is still largely viewed in the region as an environmental mandate. As such, if this platform is to succeed, a paradigm shift is needed so that sustainable development is viewed as an integrated economic, social and environmental agenda of the highest priority for the Arab region. Greater engagement with major groups in these regional forums would also support the formation of regional partnerships on thematic issues, as well as accountability and transparency.

---

<sup>71</sup> Through its Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE)



The Arab region has numerous regional strategies and initiatives relating to sustainable development, including the Sustainable Development Initiative for the Arab Region, as well as strategies on food, energy, water and climate change, amongst others. The SDGs also provide an opportunity to bring these strategies together under a single, cohesive strategic regional framework.

Similarly, for the SDG framework to be effectively implemented, sustainable development will also need to be significantly elevated as the overarching framework for the UN's work in the Arab region. The Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) of the UN would play a key coordination role to ensure that the efforts of UN agencies are effectively aligned and coordinated within the SDG framework. ESCWA coordinates the RCM and plays a leading role in monitoring progress on the MDGs and publishes regular progress reports with UN partners. This monitoring role would need to be expanded significantly under a broadened SDG framework, including the development of national and regional capacities to collect and manage data. In this regard, a framework for sustainable development indicators for the Arab region has been developed but it has not been widely adopted by countries in the region. In addition, ESCWA has expanded monitoring of water quality in the region through its MDG+ initiative. Such initiatives could provide some of the components for a new regional and national monitoring framework for the SDGs (see [Box 6](#)).

### **3.3.3 National Accountability Mechanisms**

To mainstream the SDGs at the national level, they will also need to have a dedicated and mandated anchor institution to increase ownership and support coordination, integration and implementation. This could be achieved by appointing one central agency to oversee total SDG implementation, or alternatively to distribute responsibility to a range of ministries or organisations and appoint an overarching national platform for review of progress (for example a national high-level forum). Ultimately, the national targets selected by countries under each global goal will need to be mainstreamed into existing national development and resource management strategies, which would benefit from a mechanism for cross-sectoral coordination between line ministries (e.g. led by a central planning ministry or Prime Minister's department), as well as mechanisms for broader stakeholder engagement with major groups.

Allowing countries to choose their own national targets also allows them to test different development strategies based on their circumstances. Successful experiences could be shared at the regional and global levels among countries facing common challenges. Selection of national targets would increase legitimacy and political support and foster accountability, and greater civil society participation would help with monitoring progress against targets.<sup>72</sup>

#### **Box 6: Arab Regional Initiatives for Monitoring Sustainable Development Sustainable Development Indicators<sup>73</sup>**

This framework of sustainable development indicators for the Arab region provides a comprehensive framework of indicators across the social, environmental and economic dimensions based on 15 different themes: poverty, governance, health, education, demographics, peace and security, natural hazards, atmosphere, land/agriculture, coastal and marine environment, water, biodiversity, economic development, global partnership, consumption and production patterns.

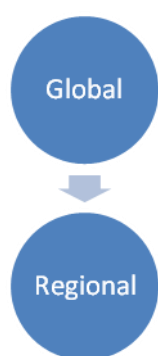
#### **MDG+ Initiative for the Arab Region**

MDG indicators on water and sanitation are directly related to improving public health and reducing the risk of the spread of disease and do not clarify the level and quality of water and sanitation services accessed by the population. ESCWA has been working with its partners to develop additional region-specific indicators to more appropriately reflect the delivery of water supply and sanitation services in Arab countries. The regional initiative for the development of a mechanism to monitor the implementation of the MDGs related to water and sanitation in the Arab Region (MDG+ Initiative) is an outcome of a series of resolutions adopted by the Arab Ministerial Water Council. The

<sup>72</sup> UN and LAS (2013)

<sup>73</sup> ESCWA, UNEP, LAS and AGEDI (2012) *Sustainable Development Indicators for the Arab Region*, version June 2012.

direct objective of the project is to establish and institutionalize a regional mechanism for monitoring and reporting on access to water supply and sanitation services in Arab countries based on the regional context and in view of developing a knowledge platform that provides reliable data, information and analysis.



*The question of how to put in place effective accountability and follow-up mechanisms at the global, regional and national levels as part of the new global partnership is another key conceptual issue that should be considered by the Arab region. In this regard, the following perspectives are proposed:*

- *The SDGs should be embedded in effective governance regimes at the global, regional, national and sub-national levels that ensure accountability and follow-up. As such, in addition to means of implementation, the new global partnership should include strong accountability mechanisms at all levels. The UN should play a lead role in establishing global and regional ‘anchor institutions’, which should be multi-stakeholder to support transparency and accountability. This new global partnership comprising means of implementation and accountability mechanisms would need to link with new governance provisions to form the enabling framework for the SDGs.*
- *At the **global** level, the HLPF will provide the accountability mechanism for monitoring progress on the SDGs, including national and regional reviews of progress by countries, but also on the fulfilment of means of implementation commitments. In addition, to enhance coordination and accountability, a specific UN organisation could be named responsible for coordinating implementation of each specific goal.*
- *At the **regional** level, a regional high-level platform under the global HLPF should provide the accountability mechanism for monitoring progress on the SDGs as well as a platform for national reviews and sharing of experiences. The platform should link closely with the LAS institutional framework, in particular the Economic and Social Council and the Council for Ministers Responsible for the Environment, and attract high-level participation from Ministers and Heads of State. LAS could be requested to explore options and propose the best way forward. ESCWA should work with LAS as well as UN partners through the RCM to coordinate implementation and monitor regional progress on the SDGs.*
- *At the **national** level, countries should allocate a dedicated and mandated anchor institution with responsibility for SDG follow-up, to increase ownership and support coordination, integration and implementation at both the national and sub-national levels. This should include high-level political buy-in and provide an effective mechanism for cross-sectoral coordination and integrated policy making. Countries, with the support of the UN, should take the necessary measures to enhance data collection and management capacities to support SDG monitoring.*

## C. A Proposed Approach to the SDGs that Works for the Arab Region

The analysis above outlines a range of key conceptual issues for consideration by the Arab region. This section aims to bring together some of the key features of an approach to the SDGs that might work best for the Arab region, based on the region’s priorities and circumstances, and for consideration by Arab stakeholders. The approach comprises three key components which draw upon the key concepts and conclusions from the above review, and are further explained and summarised visually in **Figure 1** below.

### 1. Principles and priorities of importance to the Arab Region

For the SDGs to work for the Arab region, they would need to: be guided by the principles identified by the region; address the key issues of priority for the region; be designed to cater for Arab regional diversity,

capacities, circumstances and perspectives. With regard to principles and priority issues for the SDGs from an Arab regional perspective, these would include (listed in **Figure 1**):

- **Key principles** for the SDGs framework that were identified by Arab stakeholders in recent consultations as well as in recent regional publications and reports – i.e. peace and security; effective governance; human rights; sustainability and resilience; and integration. These principles should provide the basis for the design of the SDGs.
- **Priority issues** identified by in recent regional consultations and publications for the Arab region, which include issues such as governance, equitable growth and jobs, peace and security, poverty eradication, gender equality, food-energy-water security and means of implementation.

With regard to regional perspectives on key conceptual issues for the design of the SDG framework, these could include the following approaches (which would be used to guide the formulation of the SDGs):

- **National ownership and global coherence** should be ensured through the SDGs framework – i.e. it should balance the need for national target-setting as well as the aggregation of data and comparison.
- The **principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR)** should guide equity considerations in the selection of national targets as well as means of implementation.
- **Integrated targets** should be used in the SDG framework by integrating the 3 dimensions of sustainable development into each goal, as appropriate. Integrated targets should address human wellbeing outcomes, maintain a sustainable resource base, and ensure resilience.
- **An effective enabling environment** would need to be established to support the SDG framework, which should address key enablers: governance, means of implementation, and accountability and follow-up mechanisms.
- **Governance** should be given a high-profile in the SDGs framework as a ‘fourth dimension’ of sustainable development. This should include a standalone goal as well as integrated targets or indicators across other goals as relevant. As an important enabler of the SDGs, governance would also need to link to the new global partnership for SDGs.
- **A new global partnership** should form key component of the SDG framework and address the **means of implementation** (finance, technology, capacity building) as well as global, regional, and national **accountability mechanisms**. This should include stand-alone goals on means of implementation, partnership targets for thematic goals as appropriate, and global, regional and national ‘anchor institutions’ for accountability and follow up.

## 2. Universal Goals with Integrated Nationally-Selected Targets

Building on these Arab regional principles, priorities and perspectives, **Figure 1** below outlines an integrated and balanced approach to universal goals which would cater for the significant national diversity in the Arab region and differing priorities and capacities. In the first instance, the framework would comprise universal goals applicable to all countries, but allow for national differentiation in the selection of targets which would be guided by the principle of CBDR<sup>74</sup>. The approach would need to balance universality (top-down) with national ownership (bottom-up) by ensuring that national targets can support both national planning and implementation, as well as allowing for regional and global data aggregation and comparison and measurability. This balance could be achieved by a consistent ‘dashboard’ of targets which allows Arab governments to determine the *speed* and *level* for each target as well as which targets and indicators are

<sup>74</sup> Common but differentiated responsibilities.

relevant according to their national circumstances. However, the number of targets for countries to choose from should be limited in number (e.g. to 3 or 4 different options) and could be negotiated at the regional or sub-regional level.

The goals should also be integrated and structured in a way that avoids duplication between goals and their targets and ensures simplicity. With regard to scope, the goals should address the priority issues identified by the Arab region outlined above (and listed in [Figure 1](#)). With regard to integration, each goal should aim to integrate human wellbeing outcomes with environmental sustainability – or in other words, integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development. In addition, given the importance of governance and means of implementation for the Arab region, each goal could also integrate partnership targets that facilitate goal implementation as well as governance-related targets, as relevant.

To facilitate integration, [Figure 1](#) below sets out a ‘four-tiered’ approach that could be used as a guide or template for formulating each goal. The approach builds on recent innovative proposals from leading international experts<sup>75</sup> but also aims to incorporate into the design the core principles for the SDGs from an Arab regional perspective. For example, these principles dictate the need for the framework to be guided by effective governance, human rights, sustainability/resilience, and integration. This proposed approach does this by placing a central emphasis on human development and wellbeing outcomes (in accordance with human rights), and integrating this with the need to ensure a sustainable resource base, the need to ensure global resilience and stability, and the need for effective means of implementation.

Overall, the framework recognises that securing wellbeing outcomes for the entire global population through sustainable economic development will require a more equitable sharing of global resources and the ‘decoupling’ of resource use from economic growth. In other words, it will require sustainable and equitable resource exploitation, greater resource efficiency, changes to consumption and production patterns, and the adoption of alternative resources or technologies. Further, for wellbeing outcomes to be resilient over time, we need to ensure the stability of the Earth’s natural and man-made systems, including stable climate, oceans and land and water systems, as well as other global public goods, such as global security and financial systems. Finally, effective enablers will need to be put in place to provide the means to implement the necessary measures to achieve targets – these would include traditional means such as finance, technology and capacity building as well as governance and institutional reforms, and would aim to catalyse the efforts of a partnership of stakeholders.

The objective of this framework is to ensure that the economic, social and environmental inter-linkages within goals are adequately thought through from the beginning in the formulation of each goal and associated targets. However, it is recognised that the need for integrated targets across all four tiers would vary between goals and will not be relevant or useful in all cases. For example, education and health goals may only require targets that focus on human wellbeing outcomes and partnerships. Nevertheless, it will be important that integration of all dimensions is considered up-front in the formulation of each goal to highlight potential synergies and tradeoffs and set a transformative agenda. In summary, targets could be formulated within each goal across the four tiers as follows:

- **Tier 1:** pursuing human wellbeing in accordance with human rights would be central to each goal, which might include targets relating to access, sufficiency, affordability, quality, property rights, economic opportunity, justice, equity, freedom etc.
- **Tier 2:** focuses on ensuring a sustainable natural resource base that supports wellbeing outcomes, in particular through sustainable and equitable resource exploitation, changes to consumption and

---

<sup>75</sup> See, for example: Melamed C and Ladd P (2013); Nilsson et al (2013); Geoghegan (2013); UNEP (2013).

production patterns, enhancing resource efficiency, new technologies and alternative resources etc. To do so will require that we transform our economies so that they are low-carbon, resource efficient, resilient and socially inclusive (i.e. 'green economies') and decouple economic growth and human wellbeing from environmental decline.

- **Tier 3:** focuses on ensuring *global* stability and resilience by focusing on 'global commons' issues that require coordination and action at the regional/global level, including some resource-related issues (e.g. climate, ozone, oceans, biodiversity) as well as other stability issues such as global security, markets and financial systems.
- **Tier 4:** relates to developing effective global, regional or national partnerships that can provide the necessary means of implementation for each specific goal (e.g. relating to finance and investment, technologies etc.). This may also include targets relating to governance (e.g. institutional or policy reforms), where appropriate. However, both means of implementation and governance should also be formulated as 'stand-alone' goals.

Each country would be responsible for selecting integrated targets in accordance with their national circumstances and priorities. There may be a significant difference between the focus of targets selected by rich and poor countries and equity considerations should be guided by the principle of CBDR<sup>76</sup>. For example, poor countries will likely need to focus on poverty reduction and other human wellbeing outcomes, such as improving access to key resources and services, improving resource efficiency, and increasing consumption of resources to support economic development and opportunity. On the other hand, rich countries should be leading the way on reducing their overall consumption, enhancing efficiency, and testing alternative sustainable technologies and approaches. They should also provide necessary support to poorer countries in accordance with international commitments.

These four tiers could provide a framework for each thematic goal, with targets corresponding to each of these tiers. It is recognised that not all goals would need to have targets that address all four tiers. However, when brought together, the goals should form a cohesive framework that addresses the full suite of human rights and wellbeing outcomes along with the key drivers for sustainable, inclusive economies and the means to implement them. Prioritisation of SDGs and targets should be left to individual countries which will assess their own stage of development and set their own priorities.

### 3. A New Global Partnership for the SDGs Framework – Means of Implementation and Accountability

Finally, the framework highlights the need for a new global partnership which comprises adequate means of implementation and effective accountability mechanisms. This could include standalone goals on each means of implementation (finance, technology, capacity building), partnership targets within relevant thematic goals, and the identification of global, regional, and national 'anchor institutions' for accountability and follow-up. As mentioned above, the partnership would also link with the governance goal/targets to form the suite of key enablers for the SDGs framework. Global goals could focus primarily on global standards and international commitments, and link to any partnership targets that are included under the various thematic goals.

It will be critical for the SDG framework to be supported by effective accountability mechanisms at the global, regional and national levels, including through the identification of 'anchor institutions' responsible for coordination, monitoring progress, reviews and reporting, and accountability. At the global level, this framework is likely to be provided through the new HLPF for sustainable development, and UN bodies could

---

<sup>76</sup> i.e. common but differentiated responsibilities.

assist with coordination and accountability by leading on specific goals. At the regional level, regional platforms for sustainable development could provide the appropriate accountability mechanism, however closer linkages with the League of Arab States Economic and Social Council should be considered to attract high-level participation and support integrated decision-making. The UN Regional Coordination Mechanism would provide an appropriate mechanism for enhancing UN regional coordination on efforts to support the SDGs, and the MDG monitoring and reporting role of ESCWA and UN partners could be expanded to address the broader SDG framework. At the national level, an appropriate anchor institution for coordinating implementation and follow-up should also be identified, preferably with the authority to coordinate cross-sectoral implementation and monitor progress.



**Figure 1: A Proposed Approach to the SDGs that Works for the Arab Region**

