THE NEW GLOBAL GOALS
FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

OCCASIONAL PAPER

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I. INTRODUCTION

On September 25, 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Global Goals for Sustainable Development.[1] The new 17 goals and 169 targets encompass a wide array of topics that include five main fields: people, prosperity, planet, peace and partnership.[2] The path toward such adoption has not always been easy. Negotiations lasted more than two years, and some countries established complicating red lines.[3] However, the final agreement eventually came through and Member States have a development agenda to follow beyond January 1, 2016.

The Post-2015 Development Agenda is the culmination of decades of conferences, meetings, summits, etc. in which State and non-State actors provided the discussions with insightful and valuable inputs, some of them directly coming from national or regional experiences.

This paper aims at presenting the Post-2015 Development Agenda in light of its social and international significance. Thus it is possible to understand why the new Sustainable Development Goals encompass such a broad group of topics and concerns. Also, it shows how sustainable development is not only focused on environmental affairs, but constitutes a holistic approach to the human way of living—economic growth, poverty eradication, peace and security, environmental preservation, rule of law, democratic institutions, education, health, etc.

The paper will start by introducing the social trends that led the topic into the United Nations. From there, it will delve into the main international conferences that have dealt with development accords, in order to understand how Member States, spurred by the United Nations Secretary-General, decided to start the long and difficult negotiation process to shape a development agenda beyond 2015. After a thorough explanation on how this negotiation took place and what the main features of the new Agenda are, the paper will introduce the still unfinished business of establishing benchmarks and indicators.

II. SOCIAL BACKGROUND AND THE UNITED NATIONS

In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development agreed that "[h]uman beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature."[4] However, its precedents did not take this person-centered approach, rather they were limited to the preservation of the environment.

A. The earliest conferences

The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) adopted a resolution in 1968 suggesting the General Assembly convene a global conference on

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[1] *See* United Nations, General Assembly, Resolution 70/1, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/RES/70/1 (Sep 25, 2015).

[2] *Id*. at Preamble.

[3] *See*, inter alia, United Nations, General Assembly, *Report of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals—Addendum—Explanations of position and reservations on the report*, A/68/970/Add.1 (Oct. 27, 2014).

[4] United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, June 3-14, 1992, *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*, Annex I, A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1 (Aug 12, 1992) [hereinafter *Rio Declaration*], Principle 1.

problems of the human environment. [5] The General Assembly seconded the recommendation and "convene[d] in 1972 a United Nations Conference on the Human Environment",[6] hosted in Stockholm from June 5 to 16, 1972.[7] It was the first time that several governmental representatives gathered specifically to discuss environmental issues.[8] The most significant outcomes of the Conference were the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme and the spur for Member States to create national environmental ministries.[9]

More than a decade later, the General Assembly established the World Commission on Environment and Development[10] which, across four years, prepared a report entitled *Our Common Future*, also known as the *Brundtland Report*.[11] It bears the name of Gro Harlem Brundtland, Prime Minister of Norway and Chair of the World Commission when it presented the report.[12] The report was of massive importance as it contained, for the first time, a definition of sustainable development: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."[13] This report shows how sustainable development is not only a matter of the environment. In fact, it clearly states that "[s]ustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to satisfy their aspirations for a better life."[14] Thus sustainable development is a holistic concept that requires an understanding in which both the environmental and socioeconomic approaches are fully intertwined with each other.[15] Hence, the initial *environmental* or *conservation* movement took a more comprehensive approach when it reached the United Nations.

B. The Earth Summit and its follow-up

In 1988, the General Assembly convened to celebrate a new global conference on the environment and development.[16] The conference, also known as the "Earth Summit" or simply the "Rio Conference", was held in Rio de Janeiro from June 3 to 14, 1992, exactly twenty years after its predecessor, celebrated in Stockholm.[17] The conference adopted two major agreements: the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development[18] and the Agenda 21.[19] Both documents highlighted the importance of reaching sustainable

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[5] United Nations, Economic and Social Council, Resolution 1346 (XLV), *Question of convening an international conference on the problems of human environment* (Jul. 30, 1968).

[6] United Nations, General Assembly, Resolution 2398 (XXIII), *Problems of the Human Environment* (Dec. 3, 1968).

[7] JOHN BLEWITT, UNDERSTANDING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT 7 (2015).

[8] ELIZABETH R. DESOMBRE, GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL INSTITUTIONS 23 (2010).

[9] JOHN BAYLIS, STEVE SMITH, & PATRICIA OWENS, THE GLOBALIZATION OF WORLD POLITICS 325 (2008).

[10] United Nations, General Assembly, Resolution 38/161, *Process of preparation of the Environmental Perspective to the Year 2000 and Beyond*, A/RES/38/161 (Dec. 19, 1983).

[11] United Nations, General Assembly, *Development and International Economic Co-Operation: Environment*, A/42/427 (Aug. 4, 1987).

[12] DAVID CUFF & ANDREW GOUDIE (ed.), THE OXFORD COMPANION TO GLOBAL CHANGE 84 (2009).

[13] *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*, Annex, A/42/427 (Aug. 4, 1987), Ch. 2, ¶1.

[14] *Id.*, Ch. 2, ¶4.

[15] BLEWITT, *supra* note 7, at 2.

[16] United Nations, General Assembly, Resolution 44/228, *United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*, A/RES/44/228 (Dec 20, 1988).

[17] WILLIAM M. LAFFERTY & KATARINA ECKERBERG, FROM THE EARTH SUMMIT TO LOCAL AGENDA 21: WORKING TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT 204 (2013).

[18] *Rio Declaration*, *supra* note 4.

[19] United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, June 3-14, 1992, *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*, A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1 (Aug 12, 1992) [hereinafter *Agenda 21*]

development in all countries.[20] The conference also led to the opening for signature of two international treaties, namely the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change[21] (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity.[22] In December 1992, the General Assembly established the Commission on Sustainable Development as a follow-up mechanism to the Rio Conference.[23]

In addition, the Earth Summit had several follow-up conferences. In 1993, the General Assembly convened a special session to review the implementation of Agenda 21.[24] Four years later, the same body decided to celebrate that session in New York from June 23 to 27, 1997.[25] Some called this conference "Earth Summit +5", since its celebration took place five years after the conference in Rio de Janeiro. The General Assembly adopted the "Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21" to renew the commitment for sustainable development.[26] Later on, in the year 2000, the General Assembly convened another review conference in Johannesburg.[27] The conference was called World Summit on Sustainable Development, also known as "Rio+10"—ten years after the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro—and it continued to review progress in the implementation of Agenda 21. The most important document to come out of it was the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.[28] The Plan showed the three pillars of sustainable development—the economic, the social and the environmental.[29]

C. The Rio+20 Conference

In 2011, the General Assembly decided to call for a global conference on sustainable development.[30] In June 2012, the United Nations celebrated this conference in Rio de Janeiro. As mentioned before, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (2002) referred to the three pillars of sustainable development: economic development, social development and environmental protection.[31] These three dimensions were consolidated and appeared again in the Rio+20 conference. The resulting document of this Conference is called *The Future We Want* and, in its first paragraph, it talks about "the promotion of an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future (…)."[32] Not only does it recognize that sustainable development spans over several areas, but it clearly states

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[20] *See*, inter alia, *Agenda 21*, ¶¶2.1 and 2.2.

[21] United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), New York (May 9, 1992), available at http://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/background_publications_htmlpdf/application/pdf/conveng.pdf (last visited on Jan 29, 2016).

[22] United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (1992), available at https://www.cbd.int/doc/legal/cbd-en.pdf (last visited on Jan 29, 2016).

[23] United Nations, General Assembly, Resolution 47/191, *Institutional arrangements to follow up the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*, A/RES/47/191 (Dec 22, 1992).

[24] United Nations, General Assembly, Resolution 47/190, *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*, A/RES/47/190 (Dec 22, 1992), ¶8.

[25] United Nations, General Assembly, Resolution 51/181, *Special session for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21*, A/RES/51/181 (Dec 16, 1996).

[26] United Nations, General Assembly, Resolution S/19-2, *Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21*, A/RES/S-19/2 (Sep 19, 1997), ¶1.

[27] United Nations, General Assembly, Resolution 55/199, *Ten-year review of progress achieved in the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*, A/RES/55/199 (Dec 20, 2000).

[28] World Summit on Sustainable Development, Aug. 26-Sept. 4, 2002, *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development*, A/CONF.199/20 (Sep 4, 2002).

[29] *Id.* at ¶2.

[30] United Nations, General Assembly, Resolution 66/197, *Implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development*, A/RES/66/197 (Feb 9, 2012).

[31] United Nations, *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development*, A/CONF.199/20, Aug 26 - Sep 4, 2002, ¶ 2.

[32] United Nations, *The Future We Want*, A/CONF.216/L.1 (June 19, 2012), ¶ 2.

that "people are at the center of sustainable development."[33] Also, this UN Conference opened the path to reach a new agreement on sustainable development including new internationally agreed goals.[34]

The Future We Want specifies that the new set of goals should inspire on Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.[35] These documents recognize, inter alia, that solutions to poverty need not be uniform, but can be a combination between nationally tailored and internationally supported.[36] Moreover, they call for a model that especially protects the vulnerable groups and involves all the stakeholders, mainly through the development of partnerships.[37] The document to come out of the Rio+20 Conference further requests that sustainable development goals respect the Rio Principles and follow international law.[38] This means that they do not aim at creating either new legal principles or human rights, but have to be founded on the existing framework.[39]

III. THE POST-2015 PROCESS

A. The Millennium Development Goals

In 1998, the United Nations decided to convene the Millennium Summit as a part of the 55th session of the General Assembly.[40] The Summit unanimously agreed upon the Millennium Declaration,[41] which was the basis for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).[42] The MDGs were eventually adopted in 2001[43] and consisted of a set of eight goals and eighteen targets to be met before the end of 2015.[44]

Ten years later, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution in which Member States expressed their concern about the little progress made on the implementation of the MDGs but recalled their commitment to achieve them.[45] At the same time, they requested the Secretary-General to include recommendations in his reports in order to "advance the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015."[46] Some experts, though, had a very different approach. For instance, Prof. Jeffrey Sachs (Columbia University) supported the extension of the deadline from 2015 to 2025, and Jan Vandemoortele, universally known as the father of the MDGs, asked for some changes to address equity in a better way.[47] The Secretary-General took the following initiatives:

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[33] *Id.* at ¶6.

[34] *Id.* at ¶246.

[35] *Id.*

[36] *Agenda 21*, *supra* note 19, ¶3.1.

[37] World Summit on Sustainable Development, Aug 26-Sep 4, 2002, *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development*, A/CONF.199/20 [hereinafter *JPOI*].

[38] *The Future We Want*, *supra* note 32, ¶246.

[39] *Id.*

[40] United Nations, General Assembly, Resolution 53/202, *The Millennium Assembly of the United Nations*, A/RES/53/202 (Dec 17, 1998), ¶2.

[41] United Nations, General Assembly, Resolution 55/2, *United Nations Millennium Declaration*, A/RES/55/2 (Sep. 8, 2000).

[42] RORDEN WILKINSON & DAVID HULME, THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND BEYOND 2 (2013).

[43] F.O.C. NWONWU, MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS: ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROSPECTS OF MEETING THE TARGETS IN AFRICA 1 (2008).

[44] *Id.* at 3.

[45] United Nations, General Assembly, Resolution 65/1, *Keeping the promise: united to achieve the Millennium Development Goals*, A/RES/65/1 (Oct 19, 2010), ¶1.

[46] *Id.* at ¶81.

[47] MALCOLM LANGFORD, 'Lost in Transformation? The politics of the Sustainable Development Goals', Ethics and International Affairs, Summer 2016 (forthcoming). Available at SSRN: http://ssrn.com/abstract=2723340 (last visited on Mar 14, 2016).

(a) In January 2012, he established the *UN System Task Team*, co-chaired by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP)[48], a body aiming at consulting a wide array of stakeholders (i.e. Member States, civil society, academia and private sector) in order to provide analytical thinking and substantial inputs to the process.[49] It gathers more than 60 UN agencies and other international organizations, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.[50] In June 2012, they issued a report calling for a policy that integrates the three pillars—economic, social and environmental. To do so, they delved into both the positive and the negative outcomes of the MDGs and then made several suggestions to keep the process moving forward.[51]

(b) In June 2012, the Secretary-General appointed Ms. Amina J. Mohammed (Nigerian) as *Special Adviser on Post-2015 Development Planning* in order to "coordinate the many constituencies and work streams inside and outside the United Nations."[52]

(c) In July 2012, the Secretary-General designated a *High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons* on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, co-chaired by the President of Indonesia, the President of Liberia and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.[53] The Panel included 27 personalities from civil society, private sector and academia, as well as representatives from local and national governments.[54] The work of the Panel consisted of reflecting on the new development challenges and the experience gained throughout the implementation of the MDGs.[55] The outcome was a report that called for a new global partnership in order to achieve sustainable development.[56]

B. The work streams toward the report of the Secretary-General

The process toward the agreement of the new Global Goals on Sustainable Development has had a lot of different inputs. Overall, Member States led it through a mechanism called *Open Working Group*, but there have been other initiatives providing that Group with numerous and valuable inputs for its final proposal:

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[48] United Nations, Development Policy and Analysis Division, Process Overview, available at http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/process.shtml (last visited on Jan 29, 2016).

[49] United Nations System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, *Realizing the Future We Want for All* (New York: United Nations, 2012), Preamble.

[50] United Nations, Development Policy and Analysis Division, United Nations System Task Team, available at http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/untt_members.pdf (last visited on Jan 29, 2016).

[51] *See* United Nations System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, *Realizing the Future We Want for All*, *supra* note 49.

[52] United Nations, Meetings Coverage and Press Releases*, Instead of 'Kicking the Can to Rio', Secretary-General Tells General Assembly, Time to Shift Gears to Reach Destination, Confront All Hard Issues Now*, Secretary-General, Press Release, SG/SM/14277-GA/11231 (May 9, 2012), available at http://www.un.org/press/en/2012/sgsm14277.doc.htm (last visited on Jan 29, 2016).

[53] United Nations, Development Policy and Analysis Division, Process Overview, available at http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/process.shtml. (last seen on Jan 29, 2016).

[54] High-level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, About, Available from http://www.post2015hlp.org/about/ (last visited on Jan 29, 2016).

[55] *Id.*

[56] United Nations, High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development* (New York: United Nations, 2013), available at http://www.post2015hlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/UN-Report.pdf (Sep. 2015).

(a) *The Open Working Group* (OWG)

The General Assembly established this mechanism on January 22, 2013,[57] inspired by *The Future We Want*.[58] The Open Working Group had an unusual system of representation, according to which every seat was shared among several countries.[59] After more than a year of work, the Group presented a proposal of 17 goals and 169 targets, which was adopted by the General Assembly through a resolution in September 2014.[60] The same General Assembly decided that the proposal had to be the main basis for the future agreement on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).[61]

(b) *Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing*

The basis for this Committee stems from *The Future We Want* and the General Assembly established it on June 21, 2013.[62] Following its name, several experts from different countries and regions integrated the team, while they did research on how to get resources for the Post-2015 Development Agenda. They eventually adopted a report synthesizing their methods and conclusions.[63]

(c) *High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development*

It is a platform to review and follow-up the process and implementation of Sustainable Development Goals.[64] Its high-level character comes from the political leadership, guidance and recommendations that it provides.[65] It meets every year within the Economic and Social Council.[66]

(d) *Sustainable Development Solutions Network*

On August 9, 2012, the UN Secretary-General announced the creation of this mechanism, headed by Professor Jeffrey Sachs.[67] Its goal is to gather different research agents in order to provide the Post-2015 process with the required expertise for both the elaboration and further development of the SDGs.[68]

(e) *The role of civil society*

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[57] *See* United Nations General Assembly Decision 67/555, *Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals*, A/67/L.48/Rev.1 (January 15, 2013.

[58] *The Future We Want*, *supra* note 32, ¶248.

[59] United Nations, General Assembly, Decision 67/555, *supra* note 57, Annex.

[60] United Nations, General Assembly, Resolution 68/309, *Report of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 66/288*, A/RES/68/309 (Sep 10, 2014).

[61] *Id.* at ¶2.

[62] United Nations, General Assembly, Decision 67/559 (Jun 21, 2013).

[63] United Nations, General Assembly, *Report of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing*, A/69/315 (Aug 15, 2014).

[64] Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, About the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, available at https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/about (last visited on Jan 29, 2016).

[65] *Id.*

[66] *Id.*

[67] Sustainable Development Policy & Practice, News, *UN Launches Sustainable Development Solutions Network*, Aug 9, 2012, available at http://sd.iisd.org/news/un-launches-sustainable-development-solutions-network/ (last visited on Jan 29, 2016).

[68] Sustainable Development Solutions Network, Vision and Organization, available at http://unsdsn.org/about-us/vision-and-organization/ (last visited on Jan 29, 2016).

The drafting process of the SDGs has been very participatory, to the extent that it constituted a pioneering exercise of global democracy based on direct participation.[69] NGOs and relevant stakeholders have been—and are still—very active during the whole process of negotiation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The engagement of *Major Groups*—civil society platforms bringing together specific groups of people—has been relevant especially during the sessions of the Open Working Group.[70] This has worked through *Thematic Clusters*, each one of which is coordinated by *Steering Committees* who, in turn, were in charge of the preparation of *Joint Position Papers* in order for the OWG to consider them. Also, civil society has been able to participate through the so-called *national, regional and global thematic consultations* in order for stakeholders to engage in a constructive dialogue. One of the main outcomes of these 88 national consultations, 11 thematic dialogues and the MY World global survey is the report called *A Million Voices: The World We Want*, sponsored by the United Nations Development Group.[71]

C. *The report of the Secretary-General*

The UN General Assembly had requested the Secretary-General to submit a report in order to "synthesize the full range of inputs then available and to present a synthesis report before the end of 2014."[72] This is why Mr. Ban Ki-moon presented *The road to dignity by 2030: ending poverty, transforming all lives and protecting the planet*[73] before Member States and other stakeholders in New York. The report indicated a path based on six main elements: dignity, people, prosperity, planet, justice and partnership. It asked for adequate financing and investments, as well as an advancing toward a "culture of shared responsibility, in order to ensure that promises made become actions delivered."[74]

D. *Intergovernmental negotiations*

Once the Secretary-General had presented his report, it was the moment for Member States to negotiate the final wording of the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Governments needed to use the Open Working Group's proposal as the basis for the new agenda,[75] although they had to take other inputs into account. The negotiations started on January 19, 2015, with the *Stocktaking Session* and ended on August 2,[76] with an agreement to be approved in the General Assembly one month later. In the meantime, the United Nations celebrated the Third International Conference on Financing for

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[69] MALCOLM LANGFORD, *supra* note 47.

[70] Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, Major Groups Input, available at https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/owg.html (last visited on Jan 29, 2016).

[71] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *A Million Voices: The World We Want*, available at http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/mdg/a-million-voices--the-world-we-want.html (last visited on Jan 29, 2016).

[72] United Nations, General Assembly, Resolution 68/6, *Outcome document of the special event to follow up efforts made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals*, A/RES/68/6, ¶25 (Oct. 9, 2013).

[73] United Nations, General Assembly, *The road to dignity by 2030: ending poverty, transforming all lives and protecting the planet* (Synthesis report of the Secretary-General on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda), A/69/700 (Dec. 4, 2014).

[74] *Id.* at *Summary*.

[75] *Report of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 66/288*, *Supra* note 60, ¶2.

[76] United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals, *Consensus Reached on New Sustainable Development Agenda to be adopted by World Leaders in September*, available at http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2015/08/transforming-our-world-document-adoption/ (last visited on Jan 29, 2016).

Development with the aim, inter alia, to support the Post-2015 Development Agenda.[77] The outcome document of the Conference spurred the coordination of financial flows with development practices[78] and put forward a proposal on how to gather the means to fulfill the Sustainable Development Goals.[79]

E. *The United Nations Sustainable Development Summit*

The celebration of the Summit took place in the United Nations Headquarters in New York from September 25 to 27, 2015. The meeting had been scheduled as a high-level plenary session of the General Assembly, and it was the first time in the history of the United Nations that a Pope—namely Pope Francis—had the privilege to open the session.[80] Later on, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also called the Global Goals for Sustainable Development,[81] were formally adopted through a resolution.[82]

F. *Difficulties among Member States*

The negotiation of an international consensus document results in a long working process. While Member States might agree with some universal statements, there are several points with which a large number of countries could feel uncomfortable or hesitant. After the final proposal of the Open Working Group,[83] the General Assembly issued an Addendum to the report,[84] in which parties to the negotiation expressed their views regarding some expressions used in the document, especially related to sexual and reproductive health and rights, comprehensive sexuality education, colonial domination, countering terrorism and illegal unilateral economic sanctions.[85]

Each of the *blocks*, understood as loose coalitions rather than hermetic groups, pushed for a specific agenda based on their preferences and worldview, but they did not struggle as much to prevent the other's ideas as to introduce their own.[86] For instance, negotiators from the G77—a coalition currently constituted by more than 130 developing States—were interested in equality for all the countries in the international arena, whereas the Western group, composed by the US, Canada, the EU (with its satellites), Australia and New Zealand pushed for political inclusiveness and discrimination's removal at the domestic level,[87] so that they could freely develop their own policies inside their borders.

IV. THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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[77] United Nations, General Assembly, Resolution 68/279, *Modalities for the third International Conference on Financing for Development*, A/RES/68/279 (Jun. 30, 2014), ¶¶4 and 9.

[78] United Nations, General Assembly, Resolution 69/313, *Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development* (Jul. 27, 2015), *Annex* ¶¶14, 36, 42, 45, 58 and 107.

[79] United Nations, Economic and Social Affairs, Financing for Development, About the Conference, 13-16 July 2015, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, available at http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/ffd3/conference.html (last visited on Jan 29, 2016).

[80] United Nations, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Statements, *Secretary-General's remarks to the General Assembly on the occasion of the visit by His Holiness Pope Francis* (Sep 25, 2015), available at http://www.un.org/sg/statements/index.asp?nid=9014 (last visited on Jan 29, 2016).

[81] United Nations University (UNU), *The Global Goals for Sustainable Development*, available at http://unu.edu/globalgoals (last visited on Jan 27, 2016).

[82] United Nations, General Assembly, Resolution 70/1, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/RES/70/1 (Sep 25, 2015).

[83] *Report of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 66/288, Supra* note 60.

[84] United Nations, General Assembly, *Report of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals— Addendum—Explanations of position and reservations on the report*, A/68/970/Add.1 (Oct 27, 2014).

[85] *Id.*

[86] MALCOLM LANGFORD, *supra* note 47.

[87] *Id.*

A. Introduction

The Post-2015 Development Agenda is one of the most comprehensive global agendas in history.[88] The Sustainable Development Goals—fundamental part of the Agenda—are 17 in total, with 169 targets.[89] In addition, the United Nations Statistics Division is working on a huge array of indicators in order to be able to assess the progress made by Member States on the implementation of goals and targets. The presentation of a report will take place in the next session of the UN Statistical Commission.[90]

B. Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Although eradication of poverty "in all its forms and dimensions"[91] remains the main challenge of the Agenda, this plan of action spans over all fields of development.

Member States have summarized the Agenda in five words, namely people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership:[92]

People

One of the fist statements of the resolution that adopted the new SDGs is that the Post-2015 Development Agenda is people-centered.[93] This follows the line which sustainable development conferences had already pushed.[94] The main consequence of people being at the center of sustainable development is that the whole Agenda becomes *universal*. Even though developing countries may find themselves in need of specific care, the Agenda is not only targeted to them, but it spans over the whole world. Actually, it is no longer a matter of countries but of people, regardless of where they live, in order that no one is left behind.[95] Starting from the dignity of every human person,[96] the new Global Goals aim at protecting the human rights of all.[97]

Planet

In 1987, the Brundtland report defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."[98] A big part of this *compromising* comes from a healthy planet, in which relevant stakeholders protect natural resources and Member States commit to fight climate change.[99] This is why the adoption of SDGs comes together with the Paris United Nations Climate Change Conference, the COP 21, and its outcome

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[88] *Id.*

[89] Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, Sustainable Development Goals, available at https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs (last visited on Jan 29, 2016).

[90] United Nations, Economic and Social Council, *Report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals Indicators*, E/CN.3/2016/2 (Dec 17, 2015), to be presented during the 47th session of the UN Statistical Commission, March 8-11, 2016.

[91] *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, *Supra* note 82, Preamble.

[92] *Id.*

[93] *Id.* at ¶2.

[94] *See*, inter alia, *Rio Declaration*, Principle 1, and *The Future We Want*, *supra* note 32, ¶6.

[95] *Id.* at ¶4.

[96] *Id.* at ¶8.

[97] *Id.*

[98] *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*, *Supra* note 13.

[99] *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, *Supra* note 82, Preamble.

document, the Paris Agreement, which will only enter into force if "at least 55 Parties to the Convention accounting in total for at least an estimated 55 percent of the total global greenhouse gas emissions have deposited their instruments of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession."[100]

Member States do not hesitate to recall the *principle of common but differentiated responsibilities* [101] outlined in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. [102] Also, there is an explicit mention regarding the "different approaches, visions, models and tools available to each country, in accordance with its national circumstances and priorities, to achieve sustainable development." [103] This means that Member States experience different circumstances and each of them needs to assume its proportional part in global development. Therefore, a certain level of national discretion is unavoidable and even necessary to precisely achieve the universality of the Agenda.

Prosperity

Economic growth is essential for a universal and comprehensive development. Member States have even gone further when asserting that "creating sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and fostering social inclusion are linked to each other and are interdependent." [104] The General Assembly Resolution 70/1, through which the new Agenda is approved, refers several times to economic growth as a premise for sustainable development. [105] Goal 8 specifically aims at "promot[ing] sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all."[106] It targets, inter alia, the raise of per capita economic growth, the achievement of higher levels of economic productivity and the support of productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation.[107]

Peace

A peaceful environment is an assumption for sustainable development.[108] It entails the good functioning of the principles of rule of law, respect for human rights, good governance and accountability of institutions.[109] Goal 16 looks at the "promot[ion] [of] peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, [the] provi[sion] of access to justice for all and [the] build[ing] of effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels."[110]

Partnership

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[100] United Nations, Framework Convention on Climate Change, *Adoption of the Paris Agreement*, FCCC/CP/2015/L.9/Rev.1 (Dec. 12, 2015), article 21 ¶1.

[101] *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, *Supra* note 82, ¶12.

[102] *Rio Declaration*, *Supra* note 4, Principle 7.

[103] *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, *Supra* note 82, ¶59.

[104] *Id.* at ¶13.

[105] *Id.* at ¶¶3, 9, 13, 21 and 27.

[106] *Id.* at Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 8.

[107] *Id.*

[108] *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, *Supra* note 82, Preamble.

[109] *Id.* at ¶35.

[110] *Id.* at Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 16.

Goal 8 within the Millennium Development Goals envisaged the "develop[ment] [of] a global partnership for development,"[111] especially a cooperation with the private sector in order to make available benefits of new technologies.[112] In the Post-2015 Development Agenda, partnerships are essential for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Member States talk about a "revitalized Global Partnership"[113] the basis of which is solidarity with poor and vulnerable people.[114] One of the most important features of this new Global Partnership is the role of private sector.[115] Louise Erskine, head of programs and research of Career Volunteer in London, underlined[116] that private corporations now have the means to interact with the implementation of the new SDGs, thanks to initiatives as the *Global Compact*,[117] the platform for business at the United Nations, and *Impact 2030*,[118] a network of employees in private companies who voluntarily contribute to the achievement of SDGs.

C. Poverty eradication vs. inequality reduction

Eradication of poverty "in all its forms and dimensions"[119] is the main challenge of the Agenda. In fact, *Ending poverty and hunger* is the title of the first Goal,[120] which comprises five targets, two of which are very specific and measurable—Target #1 pledges to eradicate extreme poverty for all people and everywhere by 2030, and it quantifies extreme poverty as "living on less than $1.25 a day" while Target #2 aims at halving the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty and all its dimensions according to national definitions, also by 2030.[121]

However, some experts have argued that eradication of poverty is not necessarily linked with equality, to the extent that inequalities may arise while extreme poverty decreases.[122] This happens, for instance, when the poorest's income grows faster than the respective national average and, at the same time, middle class increasingly erodes.[123] In this sense, Target #1 in the tenth Goal—a faster income growth than the national average for the bottom 40% of the population—would be neither comprehensive nor holistic. As a result, while poverty seems well-addressed in the Agenda, the problem of inequalities still lacks a comprehensive response.

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[111] United Nations, Millennium Development Goals, Goal 8, available at http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/global.shtml (last visited on Jan 29, 2016).

[112] *Id.*

[113] *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, *Supra* note 82, ¶¶39 and 40.

[114] *Id.*

[115] *Id.* at ¶¶39, 41, 52, 60, 67, 70, 79 and 84.

[116] Joe Sandler Clarke, *7 reasons the SDGs will be better than the MDGs*, THE GUARDIAN, Sep. 26, 2015, available at http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/sep/26/7-reasons-sdgs-will-be-better-than-the-mdgs (last visited Jan. 29, 2016).

[117] United Nations Global Compact, available at https://www.unglobalcompact.org/ (last visited on Jan. 29, 2016).

[118] Impact 2030, available at http://www.impact2030.com/ (last visited on Jan. 29, 2016).

[119] *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, *Supra* note 82, Preamble.

[120] United Nations, Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, available at https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs (last visited on Mar. 14, 2016).

[121] Jan Vandemoortele, *Un vistazo sereno a los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible*, EL PAÍS, Sep. 25, 2015, at http://elpais.com/elpais/2015/09/01/planeta_futuro/1441129808_242789.html (last visited on Mar. 14, 2016).

[122] Jan Vandemoortele, *Los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible se quedan cortos*, EL PAÍS, Aug. 10, 2015, at http://elpais.com/elpais/2015/08/07/planeta_futuro/1438937603_140052.html (last visited on Mar. 14, 2016).

[123] *For richer, for poorer*, THE ECONOMIST, Oct. 13, 2012, available at http://www.economist.com/node/21564414 (last visited on Mar. 14, 2015).

D. *Global vs. universal*

United Nations officials and representatives repeatedly stated that, while MDGs used to shape a top-down agenda—from developed to developing countries—SDGs are *universally* applicable to all countries, regardless of their position in the GDP ranking. However, experts suggest that the Post-2015 Development Agenda is rather *global*, not *universal*. For instance, Goal #2 refers to "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture."[124] While this is clearly a global objective, it does not include other issues directly related to food consumption, such as obesity. Therefore, the agenda is *global* in its approach to most of its topics—they are applicable to all countries—but fails to be *universal*, since it overlooks some situations that are very important to assess the whole picture.

E. *Time frame and measurability*

Only 45 out of the complete list of 169 targets include clear and specific deadlines.[125] This means that, although the whole Agenda is a plan for the next 15 years, the period 2015-2030 is actually the time in which the Agenda is *in force*. Every target, though, should include a deadline to which both Member States and civil society may refer. This deadline would also ease the action plan behind every objective in the Agenda. Moreover, most of the targets are drafted through unclear and diffused clauses. For example, Target #1 (Goal #7) aims at "ensur[ing] universal access to *affordable*, *reliable* and *modern* energy services." These words are undoubtedly full of good intentions but do not help to cement which kind of energy the world population should have access to.

F. *Ambitious vs. unrealistic*

The Post-2015 Development Agenda has always aimed to be ambitious. However, good intentions may easily fall into hopeless idealism if separated from a result and a deadline. For instance, Target #4 (Goal #1) reads "to ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have *equal rights to economic resources* (…)." Even if this objective is commendable, the meaning of *equal rights to economic resources* remains too open, and the lack of both a timeframe and a specific result to achieve leaves this Target clearly unprotected. Also, experts state that *ending hunger* (Target #2.1) is completely unrealistic—child malnutrition dropped from 25% to 14% in the last 25 years,[126] which is very good news, but this does not mean that it will drop to 0% in the following 15 years. There is actually no scientific basis supporting the feasibility of that target.[127]

G. *International vs. national*

The document all Member States agreed upon affirms that "[The Agenda] is accepted by all countries and is applicable to all, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities."[128] Actually, some of the challenges contained in the SDGs are collective challenges, while some others are subject to specific countries. An example of these collective resolutions is Target #3.1, which raises the problem of maternal mortality and proposes a reduction to less than 70 per 100,000 births. This means that, in order to fulfill this target, the *world average* needs to be below 70, even if some countries do not

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[124] United Nations, Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, *supra* note 120.

[125] Jan Vandemoortele, *Un vistazo sereno a los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible*, *supra* note 121.

[126] *Id.*

[127] *Id.*

[128] *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, *Supra* note 82, ¶5.

reach this figure. However, Target #3.2 asks *all countries* to "reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births." It will not be enough if the *world average* equals or is set below those numbers, since the target refers to *all countries*. The point here is whether this last target—and all those following the same structure—stand against the principle of national capacity, which will entail a contradiction with the very nature of the Agenda.[129]

H. Missing concepts: democracy and accountability

The resolution approved by the General Assembly on Sep. 25, 2015, barely mentions the concepts of *democracy* and *accountability*. Democracy appears just once and it does so in the opening paragraphs,[130] in a very inspirational context. Accountability also appears in the opening paragraphs,[131] twice in its case, but also in a very general meaning that does not set specific fields of concern. Goal #17, which deals with global partnerships, actually mentions accountability in one of its headlines (Targets #17.18 and #17.19), but does not foresee any concrete way in which to foster this accountability—it rather focuses on data availability.

V. THE INDICATORS

One of the most important questions of the SDGs is the way to measure the progress made in each of their targets. This is why, on March 6, 2015, the United Nations Statistical Commission created the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDGs Indicators (IAEG-SDGs).[132] Both UN Member States and international and regional agencies integrate the Group and its mandate is to propose a SDG indicator framework.[133]

The General Assembly resolution approving the new Agenda stressed that the indicators had to be simple, robust, refer to all Goals and Targets and preserve the political balance and integration contained in the wording of the SDGs.[134] The process to establish the baseline data—even where they are not yet available—requires time and remains open by its own nature, since data availability is constantly improving.[135] After several meetings, in December 2015 the IAEG-SDGs submitted a report[136] further presented and discussed during the 47th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2016. The Group eventually proposed a set of 231 indicators, 80 of which contain an asterisk (*), also called *grey* indicators, meaning that they still need further work.[137] For instance, Target #2.b says aims at "correct[ing] and prevent[ing] trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets […]." One of the proposed indictors for this very Target is the "percentage change in import and export tariffs on agricultural products." Therefore, determination of the *percentage* for this indicator is critical. There might be separate indicators for different groups of countries (i.e. LDCs).

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[129] Jan Vandemoortele, *Un vistazo sereno a los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible*, *supra* note 121.

[130] *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, *Supra* note 82, ¶9.

[131] *Id.* at ¶¶45 and 47.

[132] United Nations, Inter-agency Expert Group on SDG Indicators, Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, available at http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/iaeg-sdgs/ (last visited on Mar. 14, 2016).

[133] *Id.*

[134] *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, *Supra* note 82, ¶75.

[135] *Id.*

[136] United Nations, Economic and Social Council, *Report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators*, E/CN.3/2016/2, Dec. 17, 2015.

[137] Asjadul Kibria, *SDGs : Clearing the grey indicators*, THE FINANCIAL EXPRESS, Mar. 6, 2016, available at http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/2016/03/06/19750 (last visited on Mar. 14, 2016).

During the 47th session of the UN Statistical Commission, a number of countries complained about some of the aspects surrounding the elaboration and content of the SDGs Indicators. There were coincident voices regarding the little time given for their elaboration[138] and some countries claimed that sometimes they seemed exclusively focused on national activity instead of international cooperation.[139] The United Nations Statistical Commission agreed upon the indicators and, in principle, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) will officially adopt them next summer.[140]

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The Post-2015 Development Agenda became a reality on January 1, 2016, when the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) replaced the former Millennium ones (MDGs). The new set of goals is the result of a long negotiation process, in which it has been possible to take into account both the strengths and the weaknesses of the MDGs. However, the SDGs differ insofar they are universal and do not target any specific country, but reaffirm their people-centered nature. They are the consequence of several social movements that started decades ago. Those trends entered into the United Nations at the end of the 20th Century and shaped the concept of *sustainable development* as it exists today.

The new Post-2015 Development Agenda has received both praises and criticisms. On one hand, the making process has been very open and participative. But on the other hand, experts hesitate on whether the Agenda is concrete enough and, at the same time, on whether such experiment is worth doing at all—the option of MDGs' extension was real and feasible. Eventually, the 17 goals and 169 targets constitute a universal agenda to be implemented before the end of 2030. To do so, the United Nations is already setting a wide array of mechanisms in order to assess whether such implementation is being effective—for instance, the United Nations Statistical Commission has already presented the indicators for each Goal and Target. Even if the Agenda is universal, every country experiences its own particular circumstances. This is why each nation should implement the Agenda in a way that favors its specific development but, at the same time, is coordinated with all Member States.

Sustainable development is a holistic concept, composed by many fields apart from environmental science. Even though these latter are included, the Post-2015 Development Agenda precisely shows that environmental realities are completely entangled with other aspects of development, and that the relationship among them needs to be considered as a whole.

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[138] *More Work Needed, Avoid Undue Haste: India on SDG Indicators*, THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS, Mar. 10, 2016, available at http://www.newindianexpress.com/world/More-Work-Needed-Avoid-Undue-Haste-India-on-SDG-Indicators/2016/03/10/article3318820.ece (last visited on Mar. 14, 2016).

[139] *Id.*

[140] UN News Center, *UN statistical body agrees to global indicators to measure sustainable development goals,* Mar. 11, 2016, available at http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=53429#.VuatRvkrLIV (last visited on Mar. 14, 2016).