

Building a Transformational Post-2015 Development Agenda: Perspectives from Asia

24th July 2013, 13:45-15:45
Pacifico Yokohama Room 503



BUILDING A TRANSFORMATIONAL POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA: PERSPECTIVES FROM ASIA

Objectives

This parallel session took place on Wednesday 24 July 2013 at Pacifico Yokohama, Japan - as part of the annual International Forum for Sustainable Asia and the Pacific (ISAP), which this year focused on Regional Perspectives on Green Economy. The session focused on sustainable development goals (SDGs) proposed for the period post-2015 and aimed to solicit views on experiences in Asia.

The focus areas for discussion included key themes pertaining to: 1) lessons learned from the MDGs; 2) linkages across issues; 3) measurability of goals/targets; and 4) means of implementation. These focus areas refer to IGES' research work on governance aspects of the SDGs, which is a part of larger project called S11 involving both Japanese and international experts in and beyond Japan.

List of Speakers

[Moderator]

Surendra Shrestha, Senior Advisor & Focal Point for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at UNEP

[Speakers]

George C. Varughese, President, Development Alternatives

Dave Griggs, Chief Executive Officer, ClimateWorks Australia / Director, Monash Sustainability Institute / Professor, Monash University

Yoshihiko Wada, Professor, Faculty of Economics, Doshisha University

Tetsuro Yoshida, Task Manager /

Senior Policy Researcher, Integrated Policies for Sustainable Societies Area, IGES

Key Messages

- **The process to define sustainable development goals (SDGs) represents a golden opportunity to refocus governments' attention towards sustainable development.**
- **There is a need to generate implementation on the ground. For this to happen, inclusive participation in goal setting and especially national level target setting will be essential.**
- **While the SDGs have to apply to all countries, targets will ultimately be up to countries to decide and design implementation mechanisms.**
- **The long-term SDGs also need shorter term targets relevant for measuring implementation in governments' 4-year legislative periods. Such short-term targets will enhance government accountability over shorter time frames.**
- **Energy is a good candidate for an SDG. Much headway has been made with the SE4All Initiative, but there is a need for differentiated targets depending on countries' specific development situation, as well as their natural resource endowments.**

Summary of the Session

Surendra Shrestha stated that Rio+20 only reconfirmed what had already been agreed on in past summits and conferences. He emphasised that for future development goals there needs to be a link between global goals and national development plans. There also needs to be a focus on overall well-being as an ultimate goal, and he outlined the need for alternative measures of progress at local levels. Finally, he stated that each target could be nationally differentiated but that universal indicators are necessary to enable global progress tracking towards the SDGs.

Dave Griggs stated that humanity faces many challenges, and that addressing all of them at the same time is the greatest challenge of all. He showed that earlier development happened by exchanging natural capital for human capital, but now the rules of the game have changed, since natural capital is increasingly depleting. He also stated that there is a new responsibility to find a safe operating space for humanity in the epoch of Anthropocene. He went on to present his proposal of six sustainability goals, namely, thriving lives and livelihoods, sustainable food and security, secure sustainable water, universal clean energy, healthy and productive ecosystems, and governance for sustainable societies.

Yoshihiko Wada gave a presentation on measuring progress by the Ecological Footprint (EF). He also presented a simplified definition of sustainable development, stating that it means living well within the means of nature. He explained the concept of overshoot, thereby warning that we are living in period of overshoot and therefore far from achieving sustainable development. He also briefly compared the Human Development Index (HDI) and the EF, showing that most countries are using too much ecological space to achieve development objectives and stated that a combination of EF and HDI might be useful to track country progress towards the SDGs. He ended his presentation by stating that increasingly developing countries in Asia-Pacific are interested in knowing their EF to see how heavy a toll their development is taking on the environment.

Tetsuro Yoshida presented on governance for the SDGs, with a particular emphasis on energy SDG. He thought that future goals would not be relevant for planning purposes but would be better for raising awareness. He also stated that SDGs should be informed by science, but that sometimes negotiations are not well-informed by science and evidence. He gave an overview of the Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All) initiative, stating that this exercise would be useful in setting energy SDGs, since many countries had already subscribed to the SE4All and that energy would be a good candidate for an SDG due to its importance for both development and environment. He also emphasised that a future energy SDG might need a goal on per capita reductions of energy consumption mainly for developed countries and in addition there should be targets/indicators on access, efficiency and the share of renewable energy for energy SDGs. He ended his presentation by pointing out that while many countries already have targets on energy, there is still a need for internationally harmonised progress tracking and that therefore more and better data would be needed.

George Varughese presented on the local dimensions of development. He focused on how local priorities can be incorporated in the global development agenda and vice-versa. He warned that the world has seen too many lofty global processes but that there is still a lack of local implementation. He reminded the audience that the top 20% of human population still consumes 80% of resources. He also was of the opinion that sustainable development means to ensure resilience over the long term and that for this it would be essential to ensure equal access to goods and services for the people. Further he stated that the local population needs simple, relevant frames and methods for implementation and measurement of progress.

In terms of discussion, participants and the audience raised additional key points to be considered for design, implementation and review of the SDGs. Firstly it was emphasised that goals do work. The past experience has shown that while not all have been achieved, some have made substantial progress, especially when they found their way into national development plans. It is important to agree on a small number of goals that are simple in concept and which have measurable and time bound targets. They have to apply to all countries, but targets will ultimately be up to countries to decide on themselves. In terms of interlinkages between sectors such as food, water and energy, it was pointed out that they can best be dealt with on the ground, and that recognising the interlinkages is the first step to understanding synergies and trade-offs. It was also pointed out that we humans depend very much on the earth and the land for our development and that it therefore is imperative to provide a central position for environmental sustainability in a future goal framework. It was also pointed out that discussions on the goals have started and that they most likely will be limited in number; generic motherhood goals with a larger basket of possible targets and indicators are likely. The audience also pointed out that subnational integration will be critical because the goals or targets will be more specific at those levels. Finally, it was reflected whether it is possible to expect global governance to emerge assisting the implementation of global goals. A realistic pathway here might be the emergence of voluntary institutional arrangements that allow cooperatives to form among nation states with shared interests and dependencies.