

# IMPLEMENTING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs) IN ASIA: TOWARD A COMMON LANGUAGE FOR GOVERNANCE

## 1 Context/Rationale

In the wake of the 2012 Rio+20 conference, governments will soon begin to negotiate the post-2015 development agenda. The outcomes of those negotiations will likely yield a set of transformational sustainable development goals (SDGs). The SDGs will help raise the profile of several new policy priorities, but the degree to which they improve the health of people and the planet will depend upon an often overlooked factor: governance. Many organisations underline that “good governance” will be essential to achieving the SDGs; however, operationalising the term remains difficult. Some organisations stress broad principles (such as rule of law or control of corruption) while others highlight narrow practices (such as engaging stakeholders or monitoring progress). This session brought together policy-makers, experts and practitioners from Asia to outline these differences and work towards a common language for governance of the SDGs.

## 2 Objectives

This session aimed at bringing together policy-makers, experts and practitioners from Asia to outline different views on governance and work towards a common language for governance of the SDGs. An initial framing presentation attempted to familiarise the audience with possible SDGs, outline relevant discussions around good governance and its influence on implementation. The second session introduced various speakers' views on how differing views on governance should be synthesised to allow for representation of both high-level principles and more operational elements of ‘good governance’ in the future development agenda. A third panel session focused on how Asia’s experiences with ‘good governance’ and with the implementation of sustainability policies can meaningfully contribute to the future SDGs. It also aimed at discussing how negotiations over ‘good governance’ for the SDGs relate to the general public, as well as looking at the role of the general public in supporting the implementation of future development goals.



### 3 List of Speakers

#### [Moderator]

**Surendra Shrestha** Director, United Nations Environment Programme's International Environmental Technology Centre (UNEP-IETC)

#### [Speakers]

**Simon Olsen** Task Manager / Senior Policy Researcher, Regional Centre, IGES

**Shiv Someshwar** Earth Institute, Columbia University

**Norichika Kanie** Associate Professor, Department of Value and Decision Science, Graduate School of Decision Science and Technology, Tokyo Institute of Technology

**Tim Cadman** Research Fellow, Institute for Ethics, Governance and Law, Griffith University

**Ella Antonio** President, Earth Council Asia-Pacific, INC.

### 4 Key Messages

- **Lessons learned from the MDGs such as a lack of ownership, an overly top-down approach, and a narrow focus on quantitative targets should inform the design and implementation of the SDGs.**
- **The interpretation of governance and means of implementation (MOI) vary greatly across different stakeholders. There is a need to clarify these differing perspectives as well as the interrelationships between different MOI for a transformational, aspirational and integrated post-2015 development agenda.**
- **A multi-layered approach (global, regional, national and local) and stakeholder engagement at each level is crucial for not only designing and implementing SDGs, but also for promoting a common understanding of governance and MOI.**
- **In Asia, identifying the capacity-building needs of various stakeholders and actively engaging them in the planning stages of national targets and indicators could enhance implementation of the SDGs at the national and local levels.**

### 5 Summary of Presentation

Beginning the session, Surendra Shrestha underlined some of the key lessons learned from MDGs such as a lack of ownership, an overly narrow focus on quantitative targets and a top-down approach. This was followed by a presentation from Simon Olsen that drew on a discussion paper on good governance and three categories of means of implementation (MOI) (finance, technology and institutions). He contended that focusing on three baskets of MOI can help negotiations find a way forward for a transformational post-2015 development agenda.

Speaking from a global perspective, Shiv Someshwar pointed out that persistent poverty, worsening inequalities, global resource imbalances are unfortunate phenomena. He then stressed that governance - defined as the exercise of power - should be structured so as to be responsive to diverse spatial and temporal dimensions in an increasingly globalised economy. Norichika Kanie emphasised the importance of a multi-layered approach and three aspects of governance: good, effective, and equitable governance. He then noted that a stand-alone goal on governance should include all three of these aspects.

From the national/local perspective, Tim Cadman recommended that SDGs require a governance framework applicable at multiple levels and that MOI needed to be embedded in each SDG. He further stressed that SDGs themselves require a "governance goal" to ensure consistency of implementation and to improve quality, effectiveness and legitimacy. Ella Antonio then identified capacity development

needs for implementing SDGs, and maintained that Asia needs more vertical/horizontal coordination and communication between multiple levels, stakeholder participation and regard for subsidiarity with emphasis on planning and operationalising priority capacity building requirements in Asia.

## **6 Summary of Discussion**

Many questions were raised from the floor regarding how to actually implement SDGs and the role of each stakeholder, such as policy-makers, the private sector and NGOs. Simon Olsen explained that the current outcome document of SDGs Open Working Group has a goal 17 on MOI, which is still generic and there is sufficient scope for engaging different stakeholders to discuss stakeholder roles for SDG implementation. Shiv Someshwar emphasised that we need to help identify potentially vocal stakeholders and help them articulate their views. Tim Cadman called on all stakeholders to take action recognising that realising many of the SDGs requires collective action.

There were questions on local-to-global versus global-to-local planning; and consolidation of many plans as opposed to building capacity in planning. Ella Antonio agreed that planning should be bottom-up but guidance on global aspirations must come from the top. Thus, the general framework for SDGs is being set at the global level to guide local SDG formulation and implementation. She said that the proliferation of plans in developing countries is not quite the issue as these are oftentimes necessary. The issue is the lack of harmony and consistency among these plans thus capacity building in this area is needed. On the question about three aspects of governance, Norichika Kanie clarified that “effective governance” and “equitable governance” are mutually exclusive, but inter-connected, so that the question is which aspect to focus in a particular target area.

Finally, Surendra Shrestha concluded the session by underlining that the year of 2015 provides a unique opportunity as different regimes that are coming to the end. As geopolitical dynamics have been changing, stakeholder engagement and active participation is expected from a growing number of quarters.