

TESTS OF SUCCESS FOR THE SDGS

A TOOL FOR DESIGNING
AND ASSESSING SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND TARGETS

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Putting stakeholders at the core of post-Rio+20 processes



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THE SD2015 PROGRAMME

This report is an output of the Sustainable Development 2015 (SD2015) programme, a multi-stakeholder engagement programme run by Stakeholder Forum and CIVICUS, in collaboration with UNDESA.

The SD2015 programme aims to increase stakeholder participation in the process to negotiate a new global framework to eradicate poverty through sustainable development, known as the post-2015 development agenda. SD2015 provides tools and opportunities for all stakeholders to input to this agenda and help build a more sustainable future, through five focus areas: raising awareness; increasing engagement; empowering stakeholders; coordinating advocacy; and strengthening governance.

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ABOUT STAKEHOLDER FORUM

Stakeholder Forum is an international organisation working to advance sustainable development and promote democracy at a global level. Our work aims to enhance open, accountable and participatory international decision-making on sustainable development through enhancing the involvement of stakeholders in intergovernmental processes.

Stakeholder Forum works with a diverse range of stakeholders globally on international policy development and advocacy; stakeholder engagement and consultation; media and communications and capacity building - all with the ultimate objective of promoting progressive outcomes on sustainable development through an open and participatory approach.

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TESTS OF SUCCESS FOR THE SDGS

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INTRODUCTION

In the coming months, the Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the intergovernmental process on the Post-2015 Development Agenda will be working towards building consensus on a new set of global goals and associated targets with poverty eradication and sustainable development as their core aims.

As the negotiations progress, there is a need to establish objective parameters which can help to define the scope and nature of the new global goals; ensure that the outputs of the OWG and the Post-2015 Development Agenda fulfil the standards agreed at Rio+20 for a successful set of global goals; and ultimately lead to the establishment of a truly progressive, integrated and ambitious set of SDGs.

Working from a defined list of key principles and criteria we have developed a tool comprised of key ‘tests of success’ to be used to guide and assess the international process on SDGs and the intergovernmental negotiations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda that will launch in September 2014.

This tool has two key purposes:

- **A decision-making aid:** To help decision makers filter proposed SDGs and underlying targets according to broadly accepted principles and criteria, and ensure the fulfilment of the original standards agreed at Rio+20 for a successful set of global goals;
- **An accountability tool:** To empower stakeholders by giving them an instrument with which to assess the progress made in designing the SDGs, and with which to hold policy-makers to account for the final outcome.

HOW HAS THIS TOOL BEEN PUT TOGETHER?

This tool has been developed from an initial list of principles and criteria, which was defined by the Rio+20 outcome document, The Future we Want, the Rio Declaration and key post-2015 reports, such as those by the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons, the Sustainable Development Solutions Network and the UN Global Compact, among others (see Annex I). Once a list of key principles and criteria had been established we developed a set of potential questions or ‘tests’ that could be used to determine whether each of the principles and criteria had been upheld. The original list of tests was refined, condensed and categorised grouped into five key ‘filter’ categories to form this more focused and visual tool. The process of refinement did not lead to the exclusion of any key principles and criteria but rather concentrated on reducing duplication and focusing in on the tests that could provide the most added value, in terms of clarifying complex issues or providing guidance on the operationalisation of key aspects.

The tests have also been grouped according to their relevance to each of the elements of the SDGs framework (targets, goals and framework as a whole) to facilitate the assessment of each element. It is recognised that some of the filters have greater relevance to certain elements of the SDGs framework. For example, integration is perhaps best assessed at the framework level with an overview of the complete set of goals and targets, whereas measurement potentially has the greatest relevance to the targets.

As the focus of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG) at this stage is on goals and targets, we have chosen to exclude indicators from the tool.

HOW CAN THIS TOOL BE USED?

The tool can be used to assess and filter individual goals, the targets identified under each goal or a complete set of goals at the framework level.

For each element, each of the filter categories should be applied in turn, moving horizontally from left to right. All of the questions (in the appropriate row) under each of the filters should be considered.

The tool can be used by governments and stakeholders throughout the design process for the SDGs to aid selection of proposed goals and targets or highlight areas where individual goals and targets or the framework as a whole may be lagging behind and need further development. The tool can also be used to hold decision-makers to account for the final outcome.

For simplicity and ease of use, the tool is not currently designed as a scoring system, but could easily be adapted into one, in order to provide a qualitative or even quantitative rating of the application of the filters.

The ‘tests of success’ tool can be seen on the following page. The supporting principles and criteria are presented in detail in Annex 1.

FOUNDATION FILTERS			DELIVERY FILTERS			
Universality & Differentiation		Integration	Transformation	Communicability	Measurement & Implementation	
TARGETS	• Are different baselines and national starting points accounted for at the target level? • Are countries able to independently decide how to go about achieving the targets and at what pace?	• Does the set of targets under each goal acknowledge and account for interlinkages? • Do the selected targets maximize impact across multiple sectors? • Does the set of targets under each goal together cover the three dimensions of sustainable development for that goal area?	• Are the targets based upon the best available evidence, where relevant? • Do the targets address the root causes and drivers of the identified challenges? • Do the targets contribute to systemic change at all levels?	• Are the targets expressed in language that is straightforward and easily understood by actors at the international, regional, national and subnational levels?	• Do the targets define a measurable objective in terms of quantity, quality? • Can the targets be easily translated into to action at the international, regional, national and subnational levels, as applicable?	TARGETS
GOALS	• Does the goal have universal relevance and communicate common aspirations for all countries?	• Has the goal been designed to acknowledge the interlinkages between different sectors and themes e.g. sustainable agriculture, food security and nutrition?	• Does the goal communicate transformational aspirations?	• Is the goal “tweetable”? • Can the goal be understood by school children? • Is the goal expressed in language that is straightforward, compelling and motivational? • Does the goal clearly identify the challenge(s) and problem(s) to be addressed?	• Is the goal realistically achievable within the timeframe outlined? • Is there a sequential plan for the achievement of the goal?	GOALS
FRAMEWORK	• Does the framework compel action to be taken by all countries? • Does the framework allow for differentiation based on national circumstances under its commonly agreed and applicable goals? • Does the framework facilitate a transfer of resources and technology from developed to developing countries to support their efforts towards sustainable development? • Has a rights-based approach been taken in the development of the goals (even if human rights are not mentioned)?	• Does the overall framework address the three dimensions of sustainable development in a balanced way? • Does the framework promote integrated thinking and system-based approaches? • Does the framework acknowledge and account for interlinkages between different goals and sectors?	• Is the framework more ambitious than the mere continuation of current trends in each county? • Is equity pursued across the framework, e.g. through targets or goals focused on narrowing disparities? • Does the framework tackle the key current and foreseeable global sustainable development challenges? • Does the framework acknowledge the needs of different social and economic groups so that no one is left behind? • Is the framework dynamic, i.e. does it allow adjustments to account for new and more ambitious international agreements, new scientific evidence and technological breakthroughs? • Does the framework build upon previously agreed international commitments in all relevant fields?	• Does the framework put forward a coherent narrative centred on poverty eradication and sustainable development?	• Does the framework have a clear timeframe? • Have intermediate milestones or target dates been set or are individual countries expected to set them in order to monitor progress? • Does the framework use credible and internationally comparable metrics and the best available data? • Does the framework contribute to the collection of new data while also improving the quality of statistics and information available? • Does the framework contribute to accountability at all levels of governance? • Does the framework clearly identify roles and responsibilities for all relevant stakeholders? • Is there a mechanism for monitoring and review?	FRAMEWORK



ANNEX 1: PRINCIPLES AND CRITERIA FOR THE SDGS

A number of documents - both negotiated, e.g. the Rio+20 outcome document, The Future we Want, and non-negotiated, e.g. the report of the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda - have put forward principles and criteria that can be used to define the scope and nature of the SDGs. As a starting point in the development of the 'tests of success' for the SDGs we collated and summarised what we considered to be the most relevant and commonly cited principles and criteria that have emerged. We sought to further unpack their meaning and potential application in relation to the SDGs, before developing potential tests for success for each one.

A key source of principles and criteria has been the Rio+20 outcome document, The Future we Want, as it reflects the original intergovernmental agreement on the SDGs.

While we took into account the directive of the Rio+20 Outcome Document that the SDGs must respect all Rio Principles, in this context we chose to focus on the Rio Principles that are most relevant or contentious in relation to the agenda - indicated by their frequent appearance in key proposals and documents on the SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda.

Once a list of key principles and criteria had been established we developed a set of potential measures or questions that could be used to determine whether each of the principles and criteria had been upheld. Table 1 below summarises the principles and criteria together with their definitions and potential applications in relation to the SDGs. This table forms the basis of the 'tests of success' tool.

	PRINCIPLE/CRITERION	SOURCE(S)	DEFINITION	POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS AND ISSUES
1	Universality - Universal applicability to all countries while taking into account different national realities, capacities and level of development and respecting national policies and priorities.	Rio+20 Outcome Document. Other relevant references: Co-chairs OWG summaries: second session. MDG Special Event.	Universality is complex and can be interpreted in several ways, including those below. Different conceptualisations of universality (the element of universality is italicised): (1) universal application: goals and targets apply to all countries equally (2) universal abstract application: all countries recognise as good the principles enshrined into the SDGs (3) universal commitment: every country doing its part in a common enterprise, achieving the goals i.e. a shared commitment to globally-relevant challenges, but policy needs and actions may differ by national context. This conceptualization would also include the idea of actions by the south being supported by the north (e.g. MDG8) (4) universal coverage: everyone is entitled to universal human rights and basic economic opportunities. (within as well as between countries). All the interpretations above have a common thread that the SDGs should have universal relevance and communicate common aspirations for all countries - the Goals should be framed as such. "taking into account different national realities, capacities and level of development and respecting national policies and priorities" can be seen as a practical application of the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) as it relates to sustainable development (see principle 6 listed below).	In its most literal sense, universality would imply each country working towards exactly the same goals and targets, and using the same indicators. This, however, would of course see the framework unable to account for national differences, thus there now seems to be consensus amongst Member States that whilst the overall goals will apply to all countries, the associated targets for each goal will be determined according to specific national contexts.¹ These targets could then be underpinned by the adoption of a core set of common indicators on which all countries would commit to report (including some of those on which country data is already widely available under the MDGs).² Nevertheless, some have suggested that a common definition of universality may need to be agreed prior to discussing the specific GTIs of the framework in any more detail.³ The goals should speak to developed as well as developing countries⁴ and recognise the significant challenges that developed countries must overcome to achieve sustainable development.⁵ There are potential conflicts between the concept of universality, CBDR and national sovereignty, depending on application and interpretation of universality. However, the second part of the text "taking into account different national realities, capacities and level of development and respecting national policies and priorities" accounts for this. Taken together, these two aspects are most commonly taken to mean that the SDGs should be designed with goals that are globally agreed and denote common enterprise and universal responsibility, coupled with a framework of targets and indicators that enables national differentiation.⁶

1 Summary of the Second Session Of the UN General Assembly Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals: 17-19 April 2013, IISD, Vol 32, No. 2

2 UN Technical Support Team (2013) *Issues Brief: Conceptual Issues*

3 Summary of the Second Session Of the UN General Assembly Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals: 17-19 April 2013, IISD, Vol 32, No. 2

4 Summary of the Second Session Of the UN General Assembly Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals: 17-19 April 2013, IISD, Vol 32, No. 2

5 IASS Potsdam (2013) *IASS Discussion Paper: Towards Sustainable Development Goals: Essential Criteria*

6 Summary of the Second Session Of the UN General Assembly Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals: 17-19 April 2013, IISD, Vol 32, No. 2



	PRINCIPLE/CRITERION	SOURCE(S)	DEFINITION	POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS AND ISSUES
2	'Leave no one behind' (expresses the basic principles of equity and inclusion).	High Level Panel. Reiterated in: Co-chairs OWG summaries: sixth session.	No person - regardless of ethnicity, gender, geography, disability, race or other status - is denied universal human rights and basic economic opportunities. ⁷	Framework designed to end “development by averages”, and instead focus on the hardest to reach. Goals designed in order to reach and measure progress in all groups, including the most marginalised and excluded⁸ with a focus on narrowing disparities and reducing inequalities.⁹ Could be operationalised by an equity or inclusion goal or by having equity or inclusion targets within the goals. The targets could focus on narrowing disparities between social groups. For example, in pursuing the elimination of unnecessary child deaths, governments could set 3-5 year targets, such as halving the death-rate gap between the richest and the poorest, or between the best-performing and worst-performing region, or between ethnic minorities and the national average. Or the targets could focus on the gap between the bottom of the distribution and the average.¹⁰ Or it could be applied through indicators but enforced at a target level, by stipulating that no target can be considered achieved until it is met by all income and social groups. Milestones could be set up to ensure that this method strongly enforces equity, with a focus on the most marginalised from the beginning. For this, improvements in the quantity and quality of data available to policy makers are key. Indicators should be disaggregated where appropriate to allow for the identification of disparities. This would allow for appropriate action to be taken to reduce disparities.¹¹ To be in line with the principle of universality, ‘leave no one behind’ must also apply to rich as well as poor countries - recognising that there is progress to be made in the Global North on social justice and equity.¹²

7 The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2013) *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development*

8 Ibid.

9 Watkins, K., (2013) *Leaving no one behind: an equity agenda for the post-2015 goals*.

10 Ibid.

11 The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2013) *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development*

12 Ibid.

	PRINCIPLE/CRITERION	SOURCE(S)	DEFINITION	POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS AND ISSUES
3	Rio Principle 1: Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.	Rio Declaration on Environment and Development 1992. Reiterated in: Rio+20 Outcome Document (art.6).	Reflects an anthropocentric view of sustainable development, placing human squarely at the heart of sustainable development considerations. The phrase ‘entitled’ alludes to a rights-based approach to development - that humans deserve a decent standard of living and may achieve this through development and resource exploitation, but equally the entitlement to a healthy and productive life must occur in harmony with nature. ¹³	It has been acknowledged in various documents and agreements ¹⁴ that poverty eradication is the primary aim of the SDGs. This implies that, while the SDGs should seek to address and incorporate in a balanced way all three dimensions of sustainable development, people should be the primary beneficiaries of the framework. How this should be operationalised and the extent to which it should be applied remains an open issue.
4	Rio Principle 2: States have, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, the sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental and developmental policies, and the responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other States or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.	Rio Declaration on Environment and Development 1992. Reiterated in: Rio+20 Outcome Document (art.58, 121).	Upholds the right of nation States to exploit their own natural resources but balances this by also invoking the responsibility of States not to cause damage to the environment in areas beyond their national jurisdiction.	A potential application would be that States are able to decide how to go about achieving the targets and at their preferred pace. In which case the framework should not be too prescriptive and should allow for differentiation. Related to the principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’ (see principle 6 listed below) in that it denotes that national circumstances and rights should be acknowledged and accounted for in the framework. There is potential for national sovereignty to conflict with the principle of universality, depending how strongly each are applied.

¹³ UN DESA and Stakeholder Forum (2011) *Review of Implementation of the Rio Principles*

¹⁴ For example, the report by the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, *A new global partnership: eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development*, begins by clearly stating: “Our vision and our responsibility are to end extreme poverty in all its forms in the context of sustainable development and to have in place the building blocks of sustained prosperity for all.” See also U.N. General Assembly, 67th Session, *Initial input of the Secretary-General to the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals*, 17 December 2012, which says that poverty eradication should be foremost among the aims of the SDGs.



	PRINCIPLE/CRITERION	SOURCE(S)	DEFINITION	POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS AND ISSUES
5	Rio Principle 6: The special situation and needs of developing countries, particularly the least developed and those most environmentally vulnerable, shall be given special priority .	Rio Declaration on Environment and Development 1992. The OWG has given attention to countries with special circumstances and vulnerabilities in their sessions.	Priority should be given to countries that are most economically and/or environmentally vulnerable.	Literal application: The SDGs framework should prioritise the needs of developing countries and LDCs. More flexible/abstract application: The framework should 'leave no one behind' and ensure that the marginalised and vulnerable are reached. Related to 'Leave no one behind', which also calls for a focus on the most vulnerable and marginalised. If applied literally it would mean that some countries would require different treatment than others. This could conflict with the principle of 'universality', depending on how it is applied to the framework. Reflects the sentiment of 'common but differentiated responsibilities' (see principle 6 listed below) that action should be taken by developed countries to support the interests of developing countries.
6	Rio Principle 7: States shall co-operate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem. In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, States have common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) . The developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit to sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command.	Rio Declaration on Environment and Development 1992. Reiterated in: Rio+20 Outcome Document (art. 191). Montreal Protocol 1987. Kyoto Protocol 1998. Other relevant references: Co-chairs OWG summaries: fifth session (with different wording, i.e. "additional costs of de-carbonisation must not be borne by the poor"); sixth session.	States have a shared obligation to protect the environment but their level of responsibility is differentiated by their historic contribution to the problem, capacities and level of development. Aims to promote equality between developed and developing states.	SDGs framework must allow for and enable differentiation. Most common proposal is to have a framework where goals apply to all countries, but flexibility and differentiation is built in at the targets and indicator level.¹⁵ Denotes transfer of resources from rich to poor countries. Developing countries are strong proponents of this principle. Has led to challenges in the climate negotiations and is thought by many to be a contributing factor for the stalled progress.¹⁶ Potential conflict with 'universality' but commonalities with 'taking into account different national realities, capacities and level of development and respecting national policies and priorities.' There is a question as to whether CBDR can also be applied to non-environmental situations and issues. This principle could be operationalised in the SDGs framework in a number of different ways e.g. could have climate treaty-like lists for countries at different stages in their development¹⁷; or target levels could be adaptable to level of development; or target levels could be determined at a country level.

¹⁵ E.g. Governments of Colombia and Guatemala (2013) *A Global Dashboard for the new Post 2015 Development Agenda*, IASS Potsdam (2013) *IASS Discussion Paper: Towards Sustainable Development Goals: Essential Criteria* and German Development Institute (2013) *Post 2015: How to Design Goals for (Inter) National Action?*

¹⁶ Barnabas, S., (2013). *A review of the application of the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities under the International Regime on Climate Change*.

¹⁷ See Annex I and Non-annex I Parties: https://unfccc.int/parties_and_observers/items/2704.php

	PRINCIPLE/CRITERION	SOURCE(S)	DEFINITION	POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS AND ISSUES
7	Consensus-based - Consistent with international law and build upon commitments already made	Rio+20 Outcome Document (art. 246). Other relevant references: OWG Progress Report. HLP report (Consensus-based).	The SDGs should build upon international consensus.	The SDGs should be consistent with existing international agreements in the environmental, social and economic fields. This should include but not be limited to: Agenda 21, Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, MDGs, Rio Conventions etc. They should build upon and incorporate existing internationally agreed goals and targets where appropriate e.g. MDGs, Aichi targets. For manageability the framework will not be able to incorporate all existing targets but should be consistent with them and certainly not conflict with any of them. With that in mind, a cross-checking exercise may be necessary.
8	Integration - SDGs should address and incorporate in a balanced way all three dimensions of sustainable development and their interlinkages.	Rio+20 Outcome Document (art. 246). Rio Declaration on Environment and Development 1992 (Principle 4). With a slightly different wording: “In order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it”. Other relevant references: Co-chairs OWG summaries: third session (wording: “recognition of need for a holistic approach”; fourth session (wording: “need to reflect the multiple interlinkages”).	The SDGs should acknowledge that actions to achieve economic, social and environmental sustainability are interdependent and should be designed to capitalise on synergies and interlinkages and account for trade-offs.	The framework should move away from reasoning in vertical silos and promote integrated and systems-based thinking and approaches. ¹⁸ The operationalisation of integration will be a significant challenge when designing the framework. Various proposals have been made putting forward suggesting different approaches that could be taken, including placing individuals targets under more than one relevant goal ¹⁹ , having targets on social, environmental and economic aspects under each goal, goals that promote system-wide approaches ²⁰ or integrated targets which account for trade-offs and synergies. ²¹ These will be discussed further in the methodologies section. It has been said that the most important transformative aspect of SDGs will be found in their ability to focus policy and action on interlinkages. ²² The extent to which the framework achieves this will therefore be a key test of its success.

18 Various sources including Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2013) *An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development*

19 E.g. Government of Colombia (2013) *The Integrating Approach*

20 Such as the cities, climate change and ecosystem goals proposed in Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2013) *An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development*

21 Personal communication of new paper (An integrated framework for sustainable development goals) based on Griggs et al. (2013) *Sustainable development goals for people and planet*, .Nature 495, 305-307

22 E.g. Government of Colombia (2013) *The Integrating Approach*



	PRINCIPLE/CRITERION	SOURCE(S)	DEFINITION	POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS AND ISSUES
9	Action-oriented	Rio+20 Outcome Document (art. 247). Other relevant references: Co-chairs OWG summaries: second session.	Incentivise and facilitate practical action.	The goals must describe the challenges, state the aspirations and provide a clear basis for practical action. The level of specificity will have to be balanced with not being too prescriptive; in line with CBDR and national sovereignty countries should be able to decide the paths that they take to achieve the goals. This might mean focusing on outcome, rather than process. ²³ Linked to the idea that the goals should serve as a normative reference point for all actors. See also, criterion 5 'easy to communicate'.
10	Concise	Rio+20 Outcome Document (art. 247). Other relevant references: Co-chairs OWG summaries: second session. UNTT "Realising the future that we want".	Brief in form but comprehensive in scope.	The goals should be short and clear, expressing what needs to be said without unnecessary words. It has been suggested that the goals should be 'tweetable' ²⁴ - this could be a potential test of success. How concise the goals are will have an impact on how easy they are to communicate (see criterion 5 below). A challenge will be to balance simplicity with being comprehensive.
11	Easy to communicate	Rio+20 Outcome Document (art. 247). Other relevant references: Co-chairs OWG summaries: second session. High Level Panel, Global Compact.	In the case of the SDGs - easy to share and convey purpose, aspirations and action needed to a broad audience.	The SDGs should create a visible normative reference point for all actors and processes, at all levels, to facilitate international coordination on sustainable development. For this, broad societal communication is crucial. ²⁵ Goals that are too abstract or overly technical risk alienating stakeholders and limiting their pursuit to a small group of experts. If goals and targets are not widely understood, it reduces public recognition and support, as well as the opportunities for holding governments to account and rallying multi-stakeholder partnerships for action around them. The SDGs should therefore be expressed in clear and plain language, avoiding jargon or technical/scientific language. ²⁶ Going beyond pure understanding, to ensure widespread support, engagement and mobilisation, the SDGs should be expressed in language that is compelling and motivational. ²⁷

23 IASS Potsdam (2013) *IASS Discussion Paper: Towards Sustainable Development Goals: Essential Criteria*

24 *Summary of the Second Session Of the UN General Assembly Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals*: 17-19 April 2013, IISD, Vol 32, No. 2

25 IASS Potsdam (2013) *IASS Discussion Paper: Towards Sustainable Development Goals: Essential Criteria*

26 The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2013) *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development*

27 Ibid.

	PRINCIPLE/CRITERION	SOURCE(S)	DEFINITION	POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS AND ISSUES
12	Limited in number	Rio+20 Outcome Document (art. 247). Other relevant references: Co-chairs OWG summaries: second session. High Level Panel, Global Compact, UNTT “Realizing the future that we want”.	The number of goals should be restricted within certain limits.	The SDGs framework will need to balance simplicity with being comprehensive.²⁸ Too many goals could be overwhelming and induce paralysis if they create a sense that there are too many challenges to be overcome. Furthermore, A large number of goals would be difficult to communicate to a broad audience (see criterion 5). Too few goals may not adequately address all priorities. It has been argued that each goal needs to be clearly focused on distinct challenges to be clearly useful as a national planning or advocacy tool as “When [issues] are combined into a single goal, it does not lead to more focus or prioritisation; it just obscures the reality of needing to do two things.”²⁹ This will have to be borne in mind when considering the number of goals. Key existing proposals suggest that the number of goals required for the framework to be comprehensive yet manageable and communicable is considered to be between 8 (like the MDGs) and 12 (As suggested in the HLP report). Although some have suggested that ten is the maximum practical number.³⁰ Having integrated goals rather than goals that address individual sectors and priorities, could help to limit the number of goals without losing the complexity or scale of the challenges.³¹
13	Aspirational	Rio+20 Outcome Document (art. 247).	Express hope and desire to achieve progress and success.	In order to incentivise meaningful action and inspire the necessary level of change, goals and targets should be bold and more ambitious than the mere continuation of current trends. It has been said in several documents and proposals that the SDGs framework should have a transformational impact. This should be reflected in the ambition of the goals, as well as the priorities they address (see criterion 9 below).³² Whilst being ambitious, the goals must also be achievable for every country (see criterion 12 below). To achieve this, different national baselines and starting points will have to be taken into account and the framework will have to allow for differentiation based on these national realities.³³ The goals must be forward-looking and sufficiently dynamic and flexible to incorporate future challenges as they arise.³⁴ Some goals should be ‘Stretch goals’ that can be attained only with considerable effort.³⁵ Linked to criterion 5 ‘easy to communicate’ and the role of the SDGs as a normative point of reference.

28 Independent Research Forum (2013) *Towards a Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda*

29 Pg. 57, The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2013) *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development*

30 Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2013) *An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development* and UN Global compact (2013) *Corporate sustainability and the United Nations Post-2015 Development Agenda* both propose ten goals with the report from the SDSN stating that ‘beyond ten, the goals would lose the benefit of public understanding and motivation.’

31 E.g. Personal communication of new paper (An integrated framework for sustainable development goals) based on Griggs et al. (2013) *Sustainable development goals for people and planet*, .Nature 495, 305-307

32 E.g. *Summary of the Second Session Of the UN General Assembly Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals*: 17-19 April 2013, IISD, Vol 32, No. 2 and HLP report

33 UN Technical Support Team (2013) *Issues Brief: Conceptual Issues*

34 Independent Research Forum (2013) *Post-2015:framing a new approach to sustainable development* and Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2013) *An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development*

35 Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2013) *An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development*



	PRINCIPLE/CRITERION	SOURCE(S)	DEFINITION	POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS AND ISSUES
14	Science-based	Rio+20 Outcome Document (art. 251).	Based on sound scientific evidence.	The best available research should inform the development of goals, targets and indicators at all levels.³⁶ Interpretation and strength of application can vary. Weaker application could mean that the framework is coherent with science in the sense that the inputs from science are taken into consideration and inform the negotiation process. I.e. simply more interaction between scientists and policymakers.³⁷ Stronger interpretation could be taken to mean that inputs from science are considered non-negotiable points around which to build the goals and indicators.³⁸ Science-based is used in the literature primarily in relation to the environmental aspects of the framework, such as planetary boundaries and climate change. The potential role of science in defining tipping points, limits, interactions, trade-offs and scenario modelling has been highlighted.³⁹ Could be taken to mean, more broadly, evidence-based.
15	Transformative	Progress report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals. Other relevant references: HLP report.	Facilitating lasting and significant change for the better.	There seems to be agreement among Member States that the SDGs need to be more transformative than the MDGs.⁴⁰ It has been acknowledged that the SDGs failed to address the structural determinants of poverty and development.⁴¹ It is therefore thought by many that the SDG framework should address key drivers of and barriers to sustainable and equitable development, tackle the root causes of poverty and address major new sustainable development challenges.⁴² The SDGs framework should be forward looking and dynamic, also addressing challenges ahead and aim to have a lasting impact on the global population.⁴³ Some discuss the need for a paradigm shift, a profound structural transformation to overcome the obstacles to sustained prosperity.⁴⁴ To achieve this the framework will need to address the transformation of economies and societies, including fundamental changes in production and consumption patterns.⁴⁵

36 Summary of the Expert Group Meeting on Science and Sustainable Development Goals (2013)

37 Ibid.

38 Personal communication of new paper (An integrated framework for sustainable development goals) based on Griggs et al. (2013) *Sustainable development goals for people and planet*, Nature 495, 305-307

39 Independent Research Forum (2013) *Towards a Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda* and *Summary of the Expert Group Meeting on Science and Sustainable Development Goals* (2013)

40 Summary of the Second Session Of the UN General Assembly Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals: 17-19 April 2013, IISD, Vol 32, No. 2

41 UN Technical Support Team (2013) *Issues Brief: Conceptual Issues*

42 Independent Research Forum (2013) *Towards a Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda*

43 Independent Research Forum (2013) *Post-2015: framing a new approach to sustainable development* and Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2013) *An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development*

44 The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2013) *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development*

45 Independent Research Forum (2013) *Towards a Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda* and UN Technical Support Team (2013) *Issues Brief: Conceptual Issues*

	PRINCIPLE/CRITERION	SOURCE(S)	DEFINITION	POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS AND ISSUES
16	Specific	HLP, SDSN and Global Compact Post-2015 reports (as part of SMART mnemonic).	Clearly defined and unambiguous.	The goals and targets should clearly identify and define the challenges to be addressed by the framework. Linked to criteria 3 and 11 ‘action-orientated’ and ‘measurable’ as specific goals and targets will help actors to identify the action required and to measure whether progress has been made. Will have to balance with not being too prescriptive to allow countries to determine the paths and actions that are most appropriate to national circumstances.
17	Measurable	Co-chairs OWG summary: second session. Other relevant references: UNTT “Realizing the future that we want”. HLP, SDSN and Global Compact Post-2015 reports (as part of SMART mnemonic).	Facilitate measurement and monitoring.	Targets and indicators should be designed so that they allow for and support the accurate measurement of progress towards the targets and goals and all levels and in all groups e.g. using credible and internationally comparable indicators, metrics and data.⁴⁶ Both quantitative and qualitative approaches are important for the whole picture.⁴⁷ Targets should be built around indicators which make use of large, available, and constantly updated datasets⁴⁸ but the framework should also aim to improve the quality of statistics and information available.⁴⁹ The availability of data is also important to for the principle ‘leave no one behind’ (number 2 above). If data are big and can be appropriately disaggregated, tracking progress in all groups and ensuring that no one is left behind will be easier.⁵⁰
18	Achievable/Attainable	HLP, SDSN and Global Compact Post-2015 reports (as part of SMART mnemonic).	Realistic and capable of being accomplished by all countries in the timeframe imposed.	Goals and targets that are overly ambitious may deter action and engagement as countries and stakeholders may feel that they are being set up to fail. Attainability will need to be balanced with ambition however in order to inspire the required action and change (see criterion 7). In order to ensure that the SDGs are ambitious yet achievable for all countries the framework will have to allow for differentiation and consideration of different country starting points.⁵¹ If national contexts are not taken into account the targets set may be too ambitious or not ambitious enough.

46 The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2013) *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development*

47 UN Technical Support Team (2013) *Issues Brief: Conceptual Issues*

48 CIGI and KDI (2012) *Post-2015 Development Agenda: Goals, Targets And Indicators*

49 The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2013) *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development*

50 Ibid.

51 The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2013) *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development*



	PRINCIPLE/CRITERION	SOURCE(S)	DEFINITION	POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS AND ISSUES
19	Relevant	HLP, SDSN and Global Compact Post-2015 reports (as part of SMART mnemonic).	Significant and appropriate to the overall aims.	The goals and targets should be in alignment with and contribute to the overall aim of poverty eradication in the context of sustainable development and be relevant to the dimensions of sustainable development. ⁵²
20	Time-bound	HLP, SDSN and Global Compact Post-2015 reports (as part of SMART mnemonic).	Action and progress should occur within a given time, defined by a set deadline or target date.	There seems to be consensus on the fact that the SDGs should have a target date, like that of the MDGs, which would establish a sense of urgency and aid the measurement of progress towards the goals. As the MDGs stayed in force for 15 years, many documents and proposals have put forward the same time period for the SDGs.⁵³ As a key aspect of the SDGs is that they should be transformational some have argued that certain global sustainability challenges call for goals with a longer timeframe than 15 years.⁵⁴ If a timeframe that is too generous is set however, the sense of urgency may be lost.

⁵² Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2013) *An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development*

⁵³ E.g. Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2013) *An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development*, The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2013) *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development* and UN Global compact (2013) *Corporate sustainability and the United Nations Post-2015 Development Agenda*

⁵⁴ *Summary of the Expert Group Meeting on Science and Sustainable Development Goals* (2013)

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