

# Sustainable Development Goals and Inclusive Development

Joyeeta Gupta, Isa Baud, Ralien Bekkers, Steven Bernstein, Ingrid Boas, Vincent Cornelissen, Masahiko Iguchi, Norichika Kanie, Rakhyun E. Kim, Mairon Bastos Lima, Pedi Obani, Petra Schoof, Casey Stevens, and Dylan van Zoomeren

## Highlights:

1. Social goals tend to be marginalized in the implementation of sustainable development while economic growth is prioritized often also at the cost of ecological goals. Many of these development issues are essentially distributional issues. These distributional challenges will be exacerbated by the need to limit the environmental utilization space (ecospace) on Earth and the consequent challenge of how this space will be equitably and inclusively shared among countries and people. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate the proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets developed by the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG) against criteria for inclusive development.
2. Inclusive development principles, tools, and evaluation criteria for the proposed SDGs fall into three clusters: inclusive development *per sé*; inclusive development in the context of the Anthropocene; and inclusive development from a relational perspective.
3. Regarding inclusive development *per sé*, the SDGs currently proposed do not provide guidance to establish targets that would build capacity for the most marginalized populations so that they can learn about and access SDG-related opportunities. In the context of the Anthropocene, the SDGs neither adequately address ecosystemic limits nor the allocation of responsibilities, rights, and risks among countries and peoples in relation to fixed and diminishing resources. From a relational perspective, the wording of the OWG document lacks balance; it focuses more on effects than root causes. For example, while the document focuses on enhancing the rights of women and girls and ending gender disparities, it does not have a corresponding discussion on the policy instruments needed for dealing with the relations between men and women with respect to these rights.
4. These governance issues can be addressed by developing context-relevant, appropriate targets and indicators, but this will require exceptional steering and leadership to ensure their successful implementation.

## Sustainable Development Goals need to be tested on their inclusiveness

There have been decades of increasing inequality between the rich and the poor. Worldwide, the top 1% have more wealth than the poorest 2.5 billion people. This concentration of wealth and the inherent power that goes with it has exacerbated many inequalities within and between peoples and countries. Most development problems are not caused by the lack of resources, but rather by distributional factors. Environmental constraints may further compound these inequalities. The environmental constraints include: (a) limited resources on a per capita basis (e.g. land); (b) declining economically-viable and politically-feasible access to specific strategic minerals and metals (e.g. phosphorous and rare earth elements); and (c) declining sinks and carrying capacities of the Earth's ecosystems (e.g. the permissible greenhouse gases that we may emit into the atmosphere if we are to address climate change). Articulating these constraints and limits and sharing the limited environmental utilization space (ecospace) with current and future generations are major challenges (Gupta 2014).

The adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), targets and indicators in 2000 and 2002 led to a global effort to improve the lives of at least half of the poorest by 2015. The Goals encouraged actions by a variety of local to global actors, although efforts and outcomes have been uneven (see Policy Brief 4). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are to be built

*“... there has been a tendency to make trade-offs in favor of growth at the expense of the poorest, resulting in a form of ‘weak’ sustainability”*

upon the foundation of the MDGs combined with the post-2015 development agenda. This process is extremely urgent in the Anthropocene (see Policy Brief 1). However, it is important to note that sustainable development research shows that there has been a tendency to make trade-offs in favor of growth at the expense of the poorest, resulting in a form of ‘weak’ sustainability. Extrapolating from such research, we argue that there is a risk that the SDGs may result in ‘weak’ sustainability, either in the design of the general goals or in the development of operational targets, indicators and means of implementation.

This possibility makes it essential to develop criteria and use them to interpret and evaluate the SDGs and related targets and indicators for their inclusiveness. Inclusive development is justified for moral, legal, economic, social,

security and environmental reasons (Cook 2006; Rauniyar and Kanbur 2010; Sachs 2004; Shortall 2008; Prahalad and Hart 2002; Sunderlin et al. 2005; Hartmann and Schraad-Tischle 2012). Such criteria would help to ensure that we not only define our planetary wellbeing and ecospace, but also explore how that ecospace is to be shared across different economic groups.

## Principles and tools of inclusive development

We divide our principles and tools of inclusive development into three clusters: inclusive development *per sé*; inclusive development in the context of the Anthropocene; and inclusive development from a relational perspective.

### *Inclusive development per sé*

At the global level, *inclusive development per sé* calls for leaving ‘no one behind’, which means equitably including the most vulnerable people in the development process within countries and internationally. We have identified several categories of marginalized groups to include: migrants, refugees, the disabled, indigenous peoples, and future generations (children and unborn generations). The five key principles for inclusiveness *per sé* are:

- Include all in the opportunities for development. This can be achieved through enhancing opportunities for education and employment; access to publicly-provided civic amenities such as infrastructure for water, energy, transport, health and safety; and safety nets for those who cannot access these opportunities;
- Include the knowledge of all in development processes (e.g. inclusive knowledge, indigenous and community knowledge, and scholarly knowledge focused on inclusive development);
- Engage all in the politics of development (in political, economic, social, environmental, and cultural-governance processes);
- Build targeted capacity building to help the most vulnerable benefit from opportunities and engagement processes; and
- Enhance the level of protection for the most marginalized communities. This means ensuring that they do not lose their traditional access to the natural resources they depend on, such as forests, land, water, fish and other resources (in terms of quality and quantity), and that they are not disproportionately exposed to the impacts of global change.

## ***Inclusive development in the context of the Anthropocene***

*Inclusive development in the context of the Anthropocene* calls for understanding the need to both adopt ecocentric standards and share the resulting ecospace equitably between peoples and countries, now and in the future. This implies that responsibilities to reduce emissions; rights of access to and benefits from use of ecospace; and costs of environmental impacts must be shared. Therefore, certain conditions need to be taken into account in all targets and indicators that may be elaborated now and in the future. The five key conditions for inclusiveness in the context of the Anthropocene are:

- Adopt multiple sets of time-bound ecocentric limits from the local to global levels, subject to revision over time in order to maintain the regenerative capacity of the Earth as a whole and also its diverse individual ecosystems (this condition can be also used to define incentives for limit implementation, e.g. internalizing externalized costs; protected areas; building a circular economy);
- Ensure that the rights, responsibilities and risks associated with the ecocentric limits are equitably shared among peoples and countries now and in the future, based on clear and predictable principles;
- Build the resilience and adaptive capacity of all, including the most marginalized;
- Appropriately reform international cooperative institutions as needed (e.g. investment, trade, official development assistance); and
- Involve all stakeholders and create holistic approaches through interdisciplinary measures in information gathering and exchange, and develop context-relevant instruments.

### ***Relational perspective***

From a *relational perspective*, the SDGs, their targets and indicators should not just focus on assisting marginalized populations but also on reforming the political, social, and economic structures and dynamics, which include the relations between groups that lead to marginalization. There are implications that need to be taken into account in the development of global governance surrounding SDG design and implementation. The five implications for inclusiveness from a relational perspective are:

- Ensure the global rule of law and constitutionalism so that no government, powerful entity or person, bank, or

tax haven is above the law;

- Ensure that (global/local) public goods do not become privatized or securitized in a way that privileges the access of some over others;
- Address poor and marginalized groups (including women) as well as the relations they have with rich and powerful groups (including men);
- Focus not just on the small-scale sector but also on the relations among various stakeholders, including large industry actors, through appropriate rules for market functioning; and
- Address poverty but also ensure that all production processes and services provided are taxed (to combat the growth of 'offshoring' in the global economy) to generate the revenues needed for the global community and for redistribution purposes.

Only if all these principles are taken into account will the SDGs become more inclusive, leading to cumulative beneficial effects for all.

### **Enhancing the principle of inclusiveness in SDGs**

Of the seventeen SDGs proposed by the OWG, eleven have a strong social inclusion component focused on

*The proposed SDGs score well on general principles of inclusiveness per sé but poorly on inclusiveness in the Anthropocene and in terms of relational politics*

ending poverty, ending hunger, improving health, enhancing education, attaining gender equality, ensuring access to water, sanitation, energy and employment within inclusive settlements and societies, and reducing inequalities within and between states. This makes the SDGs *prima facie* strong on inclusiveness; however, the elaboration in the text on targets is much weaker in terms of meeting our criteria for inclusiveness.

A closer examination reveals that although there is emphasis placed upon both enhancing access and opportunities and including all in political participation and capacity building, there is very little focus on the extra capacity building and support needed for the poorest and most marginalized to ensure that they are actually able to access new SDG-initiated resources and opportunities. For example, the SDG provision of drinking water should not come, for example, at the cost of land, water, and ecospace 'grabbing', which disenfranchise local actors. When one goes beyond the general principles, it

becomes clear that the OWG's outcome document does not score well in addressing ecosystemic limits. Several examples are: (a) Instead of focusing on mitigation goals and targets in relation to climate change, it focuses more on adaptation and resilience. This focus on adaptation will result in a never-ending story if the climate problem is not rapidly controlled. (b) Although oceanic-resource limits are dealt with, the text is much more cautious in dealing with the issues of how these limited resources are to be shared among peoples and countries. (c) There is limited focus on ensuring that resources consumed to generate economic growth are reduced, reused and recycled within a circular sustainable economy.

In terms of relational issues: (a) Several targets focus on women but none address changing the relations between

men and women. (b) Some targets focus on the poor, but none deal with changing the relations between the rich and poor or the powerful and powerless. (c) Other targets focus on relations within the small-scale sector, but none attend to how markets can be reformed. Furthermore, while certain targets focus on generating new resources, they are very limited in their considerations of the large tax havens and huge business economies that operate outside of the various tax systems.

Without attention to the principles of inclusive development, the SDGs will join the sphere of paternalistic goals, which may enhance the conditions of the vulnerable while not adequately addressing the challenging relational politics of sharing our Earth in the Anthropocene.

## References:

- Cook, Sarah. 2006. "Structural change, growth and poverty reduction in Asia: Pathways to inclusive development." *Development Policy Review*, 24, 51-80.
- Gupta, Joyeeta. 2014. "Sharing our Earth." Inaugural address as Professor of Environment and Development in the Global South, University of Amsterdam, 5 June 2014. Available from [http://www.oratiereeks.nl/upload/pdf/PDF-3450weboratie\\_Gupta.pdf](http://www.oratiereeks.nl/upload/pdf/PDF-3450weboratie_Gupta.pdf) (Accessed 8/20/2014).
- Hartmann, Hauke and Daniel Schraad-Tischler. 2012. "Social exclusion and political change: When do inequality and economic frustration erupt into political turmoil?" *Americas Quarterly* [online]. Available from <http://www.americasquarterly.org/hartmann> (Accessed 8/20/2014).
- Prahalad, C.K. and Stuart. L. Hart. 2002. "The fortune at the bottom of the pyramid: Low-income markets present a prodigious opportunity for the world's wealthiest companies – to see their fortunes and bring prosperity to the aspiring poor." *Strategy+Business*, 26, 1-14.
- Rauniyar, Ganesh and Ravi Kanbur. 2010. "Inclusive growth and inclusive development: a review and synthesis of Asian Development Bank literature." *Journal of the Asia Pacific Economy*, 15, 455-469.
- Sachs, Ignacy. 2004. "Inclusive development strategy in an era of globalization." International Labour Office working paper No.35. Geneva: International Labour Organization. Available from [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—dgreports/—integration/documents/publication/wcms\\_079129.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—dgreports/—integration/documents/publication/wcms_079129.pdf) (Accessed 8/20/2014).
- Shortall, Sally. 2008. "Are rural development programmes socially inclusive? Social inclusion, civic engagement, participation, and social capital: Exploring the differences." *Journal of Rural Studies*, 24, 450-457.
- Sunderlin, William D., Arild Angelsen, Brian Belcher, Paul Burgers, Robert Nasi, Levania Santoso and Sven Wunder. 2005. "Livelihoods, forests, and conservation in developing countries: An overview." *World Development*, 33, 1383-1402.

Sustainable Development Goals and Inclusive Development  
POST2015/UNU-IAS Policy Brief #5

Copyright © United Nations University, Project on Sustainability Transformation Beyond 2015 (POST2015) and the Earth System Governance Project, 2014  
The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations University, Tokyo Institute of Technology or the Earth System Governance Project.

Published by: United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS), Tokyo, Japan  
Tokyo Institute of Technology, Tokyo, Japan  
Earth System Governance Project, Lund, Sweden

Please cite this report as: Joyeeta Gupta, Isa Baud, Ralien Bekkers, Steven Bernstein, Ingrid Boas, Vincent Cornelissen, Masahiko Iguchi, Norichika Kanie, Rakhyn E. Kim, Mairon Bastos Lima, Pedi Obani, Petra Schoof, Casey Stevens, and Dylan van Zoomeren. 2014. Sustainable Development Goals and Inclusive Development. POST2015/UNU-IAS Policy Brief #5. Tokyo: United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability

Editor: Reed Evans, [reedevans.re@gmail.com](mailto:reedevans.re@gmail.com) Design and Layout: Noge Printing Co., Japan