



The Norwegian Forum
for Development
and Environment

ForUM's Response to the Synthesis Report of the Secretary General

ForUM welcomes the Secretary General's Synthesis Report as an important instrument for strengthening the goals and targets proposed by the UN Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG), and to provide guidance for the text on Financing for Development (FfD) that will be adopted in Addis Ababa. Norway should use the report to improve the goals and FfD-resolution, but must also be aware of and counteract areas in the report that risk weakening the final outcome.

On an overarching level **we strongly support the Secretary General's recommendation to sustain the 17 goals and targets** suggested by the OWG, **while framing them in a focused and concise manner**. His recommendation **to perform a technical review of targets to ensure that they are precise, implementable, measurable, and action-oriented, is of equal importance**.

While we are more concerned about the content than the exact number of goals, we are convinced that 10-12 goals would be insufficient to cover all three aspects of sustainability (economic, social and environmental). The previous negotiations in the OWG also indicate that the goals that would be cut first are goals that are crucial to permanently eliminate poverty, reduce inequalities and secure sustainable development. These are the goals on good governance and peaceful societies, climate, sustainable production and consumption, reducing inequality, and targets in the gender goal providing women full legal and political equality. [1]

Many of the targets from the OWG are currently not measurable or action-oriented. The negotiations on the sustainable development goals in 2015 must cover technical proofing or tweaking of the language in the targets, indicators, and additional targets to correct this. **However, it is essential that the current targets are viewed as a minimum level of ambition and constitute a floor, and that changes may only be made if they raise ambitions from this level.**

While we welcome the proposal that UN staff is tasked with doing a technical review of the targets to ensure that each is framed in language that is specific, measurable and consistent with existing UN standards and agreements, as well as develop a set of indicators, further political guidance must be given by states in some areas to secure success. Below we have outlined conclusions in the report that Norway must take action to implement, either as tweaked language, new targets or indicators, in the negotiations.

Conclusions from the report that Norway must act to integrate in targets, indicators, or FfD-text:

- The report concludes that an enabling environment under the rule of law must be secured for **press freedom and access to information, freedom of expression, assembly and association, and the free, active and meaningful engagement of civil society** (para 78, page 23-24). **Norway must seek to define these freedoms in target 16.10 in the current SDGs, which protects fundamental freedoms, and ensure that indicators measure these freedoms.**

- The report strongly promotes **an agenda that leaves no one behind** (para 36, page 10) and **disaggregation of data by gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location, and other characteristics relevant to national contexts** (pages 13, 25, 39). Norway should act to **ensure that this agenda is fully integrated in the SDG framework in a way that makes it actionable and measurable**, and put strong emphasis on reducing inequalities.
- **The report specifically raises the need for the world to address income inequality.** (para 68, page 21) This has recently also been supported by the OECD. Angel Gurría, its Secretary General, states that: “Compelling evidence proves that addressing high and growing inequality is critical to promote strong and sustained growth and needs to be at the centre of the policy debate. Countries that promote equal opportunity for all from an early age are those that will grow and prosper.”[2] Norway should act on this and seek to **add a target to reduce inequality in income and wealth between the richest and the poorest segments of populations in the SDGs.**
- The report concludes that “the strength of an economy must be measured by the degree to which it meets the needs of people, and on how sustainably and equitably it does so. We need inclusive growth, built on decent jobs, livelihoods and rising real incomes for all and measured in ways that go beyond GDP and account for human well-being, sustainability and equity” (para 72, page 22). Supported by this conclusion, Norway must seek to **ensure that human wellbeing, equality and environmental capital are defined in target 17.19 to develop measurements of progress that complement GDP, and are fully implemented at all levels.**
- The report points out that the rise in global **average temperature should be kept below 2 degrees Celsius** (para 53, page 15). A **target for this should be added** to goal 13, to combat climate change, in the SDGs.
- The report concludes that all countries should adopt “policies to encourage responsible and accountable investment of private finance in sustainable development, and **requiring companies to undertake mandatory Economic Environment Social and Governance (EESG) reporting, accompanied with regulatory changes that ensure that investor incentives are aligned with sustainable development goals**” (para104, page 30). It also specifies that the SDGs should **ensure investment policies that are in line with the UN’s Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPR), core labour standards of the ILO, and United Nations environmental standards** (para 105, page 31).

Since corporate accountability targets currently are lacking in the SDGs, it is of the utmost importance that Norway **act to add a target to implement mandatory EESG reporting, and the UNGPR, ILO, and UN environmental standards into national legislation and action plans.** Alternatively target 12.6 could be specified accordingly. Indicators must measure this. As a complementary and supporting measure, the same corporate accountability targets should be included **in the FfD-resolution.**

- The report underlines the need for strong action **to hinder illicit financial flows including tax evasion**, and measures to **ensure information exchange, judicial cooperation, and the establishment of an intergovernmental body on tax matters under the auspices of the UN** (para 115, page 32). It is of great importance that Norway builds on the support from the report to **propose this in the FfD-resolution.** Also, **target 16.4 in the SDGs to reduce illicit financial flows must be specified, and become action-oriented and measurable in this regard**, and it must be ensured that it is **integrated in its indicators.**
- The report recognizes that developed countries not only need to fulfil their previous commitment to **provide 0.7% of GNI as official development assistance (ODA)**, but that **concrete timetables** are needed to ensure that

the target be reached in a timely manner (para 98, page 29). **Norway should work for binding timetables to fulfill this in the FfD-resolution.**

- The report calls upon Member States to “**ensure that our global intellectual property regimes and the application of TRIPS flexibilities are fully consistent with and contribute to the goals of sustainable development**” (para 126, page 35). This is reflected in target 3b in the current SDGs in relation to medicines, but is lacking in target 17.7 on environmental technologies. **Norway must work to add this to target 17.7, and to include a text that encourages the full use of TRIPS flexibilities in relation to medicines and environmentally sound technologies in the FfD-resolution.**
- Para 102 in the report states that **agricultural export subsidies from developed countries should be removed.** This is well targeted in 2b in the current SDGs, and **should be enforced in the FfD-resolution.**
- The report also strongly encourages Member States to **use innovative ways to raise additional resources** including, inter alia, various tax (e.g., **financial transaction taxes, carbon tax, airline ticket levies**) and non-tax (e.g., **emission allowances**) mechanisms (para 112, page 32). **Norway should seek to incorporate such mechanisms in the FfD-resolution and means of implementation targets in the SDGs.**
- The report states that fiscal and macro-economic policies must include low carbon solutions for sustainable development. It suggests **carbon pricing, and that harmful fossil fuel subsidies, both direct and indirect, should be phased out** (para 102, page 30). Target 12c in the SDGs addresses the need to phase out harmful fossil fuel subsidies, but in a weak language. Norway should seek to **ensure indicators that lead to action, and incorporate carbon pricing and out phasing of fossil fuel subsidies in the FfD-resolution.**
- The report states that agenda must “**seek the prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples**”. (para.68, page21). **Norway must act to add this critical principle to target 16.7 in the SDGs on participation in decision making.**
- The report recommends commitment to **public transparency, information sharing, participatory monitoring and open data** (para 142, page 39). Norway should seek to ensure this both in the SDG and FfD-framework.
- The Secretary General concludes that to ensure transformation **the SDGs must be fully aligned with the existing human rights framework, and reflect its fundamental principles of universality, equality and non-discrimination**, as well as progressive realization and non-regression (para 65, page 19). Supported by this conclusion, Norway should seek to strengthen the human rights framework within the SDGs in general, to move from a model of charity to a model based on dignity of rights-holders.

Conclusions from the report that could weaken the current OWG targets and FfD-resolution:

- We regret that sexual and reproductive health and rights are addressed in weaker language in the report than in the current SDGs. This is because **the report excludes sexual health and only relates reproductive health and rights to women.** It is important that this is not used as an excuse to water down the current SDG target 5.6.
- **The report fails to mention that the UN General Assembly has initiated a very important process to develop a multilateral legal framework for sovereign debt restructurings by September 2015.** Instead, the report mentions that an “*informal forum on sovereign debt*” could be established (para 116, page 32). Such a forum

cannot solve most of the debt-related problems faced by countries such as predatory vulture funds' lawsuits. A multilateral legal framework for sovereign debt restructuring should be an essential pillar of the Post-2015 Global Partnership, and the FfD-resolution, and it is crucial that governments focus on agreeing this framework by September 2015 as planned.

Six essential elements: Dignity, People, Prosperity, Planet, Justice, and Partnership

The report suggests grouping the 17 goals from the OWG into the six elements above. We find the headlines attractive, reinforcing the universality, integration, and transformability of the agenda, and see this as a fruitful way to communicate the goals[3]. However, this must not lead to some goals being given less priority or weight. We are concerned that the goal on gender seems to be split between the Dignity and People elements, which might weaken it.

[1] For further developed argumentation about the number of goals, please see ForUMs separate paper on this at <http://www.forumfor.no/assets/docs/ForUMs-innspill-om-antallet-nye-b%C3%A6rekraftige-utviklingsm%C3%A5l.pdf> .

[2]<http://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/dec/09/revealed-wealth-gap-oecd-report>

[3] For ForUMs thoughts on how to communicate the goals, please see our separate paper on the number of goals at <http://www.forumfor.no/assets/docs/ForUMs-innspill-om-antallet-nye-b%C3%A6rekraftige-utviklingsm%C3%A5l.pdf> .