



## **RIO + 20: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** *A Proposal from the Governments of Colombia and Guatemala*

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The Governments of Colombia and Guatemala consider that Rio + 20 constitutes a critical opportunity for the international community to agree on a concrete approach that delivers means for measuring – in accordance with the contexts and priorities of each country – both advances as well as bottlenecks in efforts to balance sustained socio-economic growth with the sustainable use of natural resources and the conservation of ecosystem services. There are experiences, such as the MDGs, that indicate that when there are objectives to guide the international community's efforts towards a collective goal, it becomes easier for governments and institutions to work together to reach them. **A key outcome of Rio+20 is that of “securing political commitment to Sustainable Development”. However, concrete ways of grounding that commitment are needed.**

Therefore Colombia and Guatemala are proposing that a key outcome of the Rio + 20 process be the definition and agreement of a suite of ***Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)***, similar and supportive of the MDGs. These SDGs would focus the broad debate at a practical level, and enable the preparatory process to productively address key issues for which measurable progress would be welcome. Moreover, the SDGs approach would generate a series of additional benefits:

- Objectives agreed to internationally could eventually be underpinned by targets – as is the case with the MDGs - that reflect the realities and priorities at national levels. They would thus be fully aligned with national contexts and could therefore be a useful tool for guiding public policies.
- The SDGs would play an important role in the identification of gaps and needs in countries, for example in terms of means of implementation, institutional strengthening, and capacity building to increase absorptive capacity for new technologies. Defined internationally, like the MDGs, these would serve both for comparing results as well as furthering opportunities for cooperation, including South-South cooperation.
- The definition of the SDGs would contribute to focusing the preparatory process towards Rio+20, thus achieving more substantive and concrete results.
- A process framed along these lines would build upon the Johannesburg WSSD Plan of Implementation as well as Agenda 21.
- The SDGs would contribute to positioning the three pillars as cross-cutting building blocks for development throughout the UN system.

### **II. THE PROPOSAL**

The process of defining the SDGs should be rich and useful, an exercise through which the international community can prioritize those issues which are the most indicative of current needs to balance socio-economic growth with responsible environmental stewardship. The process should result in the definition of a small number of key Objectives that could be later elaborated through a suite of targets, much like the MDGs.

The SDGs would be based on Agenda 21 given that it already maps our requirements for sustainable development. This would also avoid reopening debates as Agenda 21 does not need to be renegotiated.



The SDGs could provide a logical sequence and structure to the process launched almost 20 years ago: in 1992 the guiding principles were agreed to as well as a road map for sustainable development; in 2002 a Plan of Implementation was defined; and now in 2012 we could consider identifying goals in order to better identify gaps and needs and provide for more structured implementation of the principles and goals defined 20 years ago.

The SDGs and the MDGs should be fully complementary. It is worth noting that while the MDGs applied only to developing countries, the SDGs would have universal application.

### III. THE WAY FORWARD

The Rio+20 process is complex, and there are many activities, consultations and decisions that need to be undertaken at national, regional and global levels *in the remaining months to June 2012*. Therefore it is necessary to gauge a practical level of ambition for the development of the SDGs by *June 2012*. It is proposed that a reasonable deliverable by June 2012 at Rio would be **agreement on suite of Objectives at a broad level**. This would mean prioritizing those themes and issues that are considered critical factors in moving forward the sustainable development agenda, inspired on Agenda 21. *These could broadly include issues such as:*

- Combating Poverty
- Changing Consumption Patterns
- Promoting Sustainable Human Settlement Development
- Biodiversity and Forests
- Oceans
- Water Resources
- Advancing Food Security
- Energy, including from renewable sources

The expected results at the Rio Summit would be two pronged: 1) a definition of the thematic Objectives and, 2) an agreement on a mandate to subsequently define (post-Rio):

- i) How these Objectives would be further developed – this would include decisions, for example, on:
  - definition of goals (as with the MDGs) and/or indicators for the Objectives
  - whether these goals would be at global, regional and/or national levels
  - how these goals might reflect the integration of the 3 pillars in each Objective
  - interlinkages between the Objectives themselves
- ii) A process that could converge with the revision of the MDGs given that it will soon be necessary to undertake this exercise as the MDGs have a deadline of 2015. Tackling both processes in a coordinated or converging manner could be a win-win situation as the international community would ultimately benefit from a more solid, coherent and comprehensive suite of Objectives.

Thus this would be a reasonable level of ambition:

- By June 2012, to define the suite of Sustainable Development Objectives.



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- During the Conference, a mandate would be agreed to for further developing the Objectives and defining possible options such as those detailed above. There would not be a need to prejudge the outcome in the remaining months leading up to Rio.