

# Goal 17—Enabling a Sustainable Future through the Joint Action of Countries and Communities: A Revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

By Nikhil Seth

The year 2015 will be seminal for the development agenda at the United Nations. Financing sustainable development will be the main subject of an anticipated agreement in Addis Ababa in July 2015. Later, in September of the same year, a global summit will adopt an outcome document containing the post-2015 development agenda, and expectations are high that in December 2015 an ambitious and far-reaching agreement will be achieved on climate change in Paris at the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This array of agreements will frame transformative actions, directions and approaches for people and for our fragile planet.

Most significant is the conceptual evolution of these sustainable development agreements, which are more strongly focused on an integrated framework and on implementation based on robust engagement. The Secretary-General has said that 2015 will provide “a much needed opportunity to integrate the broader United Nations agenda, with its inextricably linked and mutually interdependent peace and security, development and human rights objectives”. Equally important is the willingness to look at the universality of efforts, embracing actions in both rich and poor countries. The prosperity, security and sustainability of our world can no longer be preserved by the application of concessional flows from the rich to the poor, but rather need to be based on multiple actions undertaken by all, across the globe. Domestic policies of richer countries become an integral part of their support for the realization of the development agenda. The ongoing quality engagement of Governments, United Nations institutions, the private sector, civil society and academia will determine the success or failure of the new agenda. This is the basis of a revitalized global partnership for sustainable development.

Sustainable development goals (SDGs), which form the foundation for the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, comprise a far-reaching set of 17 goals and 169 targets proposed by the General Assembly Open Working Group. While the SDGs will carry forward to 2030 the development torch lit by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and use the existing goal-target-indicator structure, they are broader in scope than the MDGs and engage peoples and nations across geographic and economic boundaries.

Taken together, the 17 SDGs and the 169 targets are designed to ensure a beneficial physical and economic environment for people everywhere, providing adequate education and work opportunities, and making sure that our youth will become healthy and productive citizens. The SDGs focus on reducing inequalities, ending poverty, and restoring and protecting the environment, as well as on creating peaceful and just societies. Most importantly, they outline the means of implementation, including finance, aid, trade, debt, technology and capacity-building through a revitalized partnership (SDG 17), without which none of the other goals could be realized.

The revitalized global partnership for development embodied in SDG 17 implies a common shared vision among countries and communities regarding sustainable development and a strong commitment to providing the technological and financial means to make that vision a reality.

The financial and technological requirements of this transformation will be at the heart of all development-related considerations. Funding—public, private, national and global—has to be substantial to meet the demands of this new agenda. Equally important will be the ability to put science and technology in the service of the poor and on behalf of sustainable development.

The new partnership will build up on the experience of MDG 8 (Develop a global partnership for development), asset out in the Millennium Declaration and at the 2002 International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico, as well as at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa.

MDG 8 has helped to galvanize support for the MDGs and to mobilize resources, primarily by highlighting the responsibility of traditional donors. In addition, the growth of South-South cooperation has offered viable opportunities for developing countries in transition in their individual and collective pursuit of sustained economic growth and sustainable development.

At the same time, MDG 8 perpetuated a “donor-recipient” type of relationship and did not pay sufficient attention to mobilizing development financing other than aid. Additional shortcomings included insufficient commitments on a range of issues, such as aid, trade, debt relief, access to essential medicines, and information and communications technology. The lack of a robust accountability mechanism associated with MDG 8 to ensure delivery on commitments was another weakness.

In the post-2015 era, development cooperation must become more effective. The quality of available resources must be made the centre of attention. They must become more stable, predictable and free from conditionality. The principles of effective development cooperation, in fact, must be further codified at the international level. Accordingly, the revitalized global partnership must build on the 2011 Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation. It must promote a shared vision for effective development cooperation firmly grounded in national development policies and processes, as well as an understanding of criteria for “effective” development cooperation in all countries.

The integrated nature of development challenges today calls for moving beyond the historical North-South divide of providers and recipients of development assistance. The global partnership certainly requires more steady official development assistance (ODA), as a vital source of development financing, particularly for the most vulnerable countries. The commitment of realizing 0.7 per cent of gross national income as ODA to benefit these countries must be fulfilled speedily.

Simultaneously, the global partnership must also rely on domestic and foreign investment and innovative finance, ensuring sustainable debt levels, building skills and competencies, promoting and providing access to trade, and allowing countries the freedom to set their own economic policies.

The revitalized global partnership must also include a broad range of actors in both the public and private sectors, as well as within civil society. The partnership needs to account for the interests of all key actors, including those who have limited access to national and global decision-making forums. It should be fully managed and driven by countries and communities that must have voices in its shaping and implementation.

The partnership must ensure policy coherence in regard to development, to include a range of sources for development financing and address the larger issues that underpin sustainable development for all. It must effectively support sharing of resources, as well as knowledge and capabilities.

In the post-2015 period, development priorities and resources should be targeted towards increasing the capacity of developing countries to mobilize domestic resources; expanding economic infrastructure; improving domestic production capacity; expanding high-quality basic social services; addressing the effects of climate change; promoting rapid and inclusive economic growth; ensuring food security and the eradication of poverty; and promoting peaceful and just societies.

As partners with a shared purpose, yet different strengths and resources, all countries and communities must respect each other more and focus on the world's common agenda as reflected in "The future we want" outcome document of the Rio+20 conference held in June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

The implementation of the revitalized global partnership should be based upon the existing evidence of achieved results. Statistical and data-gathering capacity in developing countries must be strengthened to enable the national monitoring of progress and accountability for development commitments. Citizens must be empowered and robust mechanisms for their engagement should be reinforced. Globally, the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, meeting under the auspices of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, is expected to play a key role in monitoring progress and enabling accountability for development commitments.

Finally, in furthering the global partnership for development, public and private stakeholders need to promote partnerships at all levels that are complementary and not duplicative. Global and regional partnerships must rely upon the vibrant hubs of knowledge and information that are springing up within the United Nations system and beyond, where actors connect according to their interests and offerings, in order to forge and strengthen their commitments for sustainable development at all levels. Some of these multi-stakeholder partnerships brought together to work on specific issues have proven tremendously successful. The Global Fund, the GAVI Alliance, Every Woman, Every Child, and Sustainable Energy for All are just a few examples of the current energy behind issue-based coalitions. This mode of collaboration needs to expand to embrace the wide spectrum of issues addressed by the SDGs agenda.

The new partnership for development established to tackle the problems of our contemporary world calls for many shifts. It requires a shift from North-South interaction to universal actions, a shift from creating a new policy framework to implementing the agreements to be reached in 2015, a shift towards stronger monitoring and review, and a shift towards trust and mutual benefits.

Central to these challenges is a willingness to undertake evidence-based monitoring and review. Nothing short of a revolution in data and analysis is called for which builds on the tools and data at hand, strengthening such capacities needed in every country. All multilateral institutions must first focus upon an analysis of existing data and the information gaps therein. A critical effort needs to be made to build the capacities to gather, process and use the data to strengthen the decision-making of national Governments and multilateral institutions. The SDGs, their targets and indicators will provide the overall framework for these efforts at regional, national and global levels.

We do not need more international institutions, rather we must transform the way our current institutions do business. Integration, implementation, evidence-based decision-making, as well as consideration of finance and technology needs should be the basis for agenda setting, legislative actions and operational activities at the national level, along with enhanced multilateral cooperation.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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