



Taking the Sustainable Development Goals from 'main basis' to effective vision – what's the roadmap?

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Abstract

Drafting a new set of goals to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was never going to be easy. The MDGs had a good level of thematic focus based around the notion that human-development outcomes tell you what you need to know about progress. That needs to evolve to incorporate themes of sustainability, growth and livelihoods. But if the new set tries to be all things to all people there is a risk of failure. The challenge is to find a 'coherent and singular purpose'. The General Assembly has resolved that the OWG proposal should be the main basis for integrating SDGs into the post-2015 development agenda. The Secretary-General's synthesis report, expected in November, will need to provide guidance for the intergovernmental process leading up to an agreement in 2015. This guidance will need to build on the many positive elements to be found in the OWG proposal as well as address its shortcomings and provide clarity on how the SDGs should be used by member states. There are four major hurdles to overcome if the 2015 UNGA outcome is going to drive positive global change.

- First and foremost is the politics of shaping and sharpening a coherent vision while maintaining the strong level of member- state support generated during the OWG process.
- Second (and almost as foremost...) is the challenge of intellectual and policy coherence. It is going to be hard to find a perspective to drive the 2015 goal set in the same way the human-development paradigm drove the 2000 set. But the beginnings of this are there – in the strengthening of understanding of sustainability and the global challenge it poses.
- Third is the challenge of getting the goal and target sets into a shape where they work both individually and together, so that each goal and its accompanying targets are sufficiently clear, measurable and coherent in and of themselves.
- Fourth is working out how it all works in practice. The notion of targets set at the national level (in line with the goal framing) is now so firmly embedded in the key texts (the [High-Level Panel report](#) as well as the [OWG outcome document](#)) that it is hard to see that changing. There are a range of significant challenges to the architecture and operating process of the follow-up system.

1 The Dilemma of Coherence

Drafting a new set of goals to replace the [Millennium Development Goals](#) (MDGs) was never going to be easy. The MDGs had a good level of thematic focus based around the notion that human-development outcomes tell you what you need to know about progress. That needs to evolve to incorporate themes of sustainability, growth and livelihoods. But if the new set tries to be all things to all people there is a risk of failure. The challenge is to find a [‘coherent and singular purpose’](#) as argued by Kenny and Dunning.

The strengths of the Open Working Group (OWG) process mirror the apparent weaknesses of the output. The participation and buy-in of a wide range of member states along with intense engagement from many non-government voices have led to a principle of ‘leave nothing out’ (unless there is another United Nations process). Incorporating the sustainability debate through the OWG process mandated by Rio+20, is compelling and necessary, but 17 goals is a lot, and arguably no agenda ever gets shifted by trying to do everything at once.

One suggestion is to find a more rigorous separation of [‘means and ends’](#) (as argued by Simon Maxwell) in order to reduce the number of headline goals. One person’s ends can be another person’s ‘means’, however, so that still needs a solid and coherent theoretical grounding to make it work.

But the broadened span of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reflects some significant and important changes in the way that development is viewed, and it is necessary to retain these particular dimensions:

- matching the intention to eradicate poverty with the intention to halt climate change, and deal with its effects
- explicit recognition of the global challenge of halting rapidly growing inequality of wealth and income within countries, which risks eroding resilience, social cohesion and the basis for public action
- re-framing development as a universal project – encompassing action in all countries to tackle global, national and local challenges.

To convert the broader vision reflecting the world in 2015 into a workable goal framework entails a range of challenges. There are four major hurdles to overcome if the 2015 United Nations General Assembly outcome is going to drive positive global change.

- First and foremost is the politics of shaping and sharpening a coherent vision while maintaining the strong level of member- state support generated during the OWG process.
- Second (and almost as foremost...) is the challenge of intellectual and policy coherence. It is going to be hard to find a perspective to drive the 2015 goal set in the same way the human-development paradigm drove the 2000 set. But the beginnings of this are there – in the strengthening of understanding of sustainability and the global challenge it poses.
- Third is the challenge of getting the goal and target sets into a shape where they work both individually and together, so that each goal and its

accompanying targets are sufficiently clear, measurable and coherent in and of themselves.

- Fourth is working out how it all works in practice. The notion of targets set at the national level (in line with the goal framing) is now so firmly embedded in the key texts (the [High-Level Panel report](#) as well as the [OWG outcome document](#)) that it is hard to see that changing. There are a range of significant challenges to the architecture and operating process of the follow-up system.

The rest of this paper focuses on the third and fourth challenges outlined above. In practice all four are inter-related and important. Appendix 1 gives detailed commentary on key dimensions of the OWG outcome document provided by ODI researchers, and a summary of the issues raised appears in section 2. Section 3 deals with the challenges of ‘making it work’.

2 Overview of the Goals and Targets

2.1 General

The OWG has proposed a set of ambitious goals and targets that address critical challenges for poverty eradication and sustainable development. The individual goals, with the exception of Goal 13 on climate change, are aspirational, calling for transformations in levels of ambition and changes from business as usual in the way poverty and sustainable development objectives are pursued. Most of the proposed goal statements are easy to understand and relevant to all countries, as requested in the OWG’s remit from the Rio+20 conference (for a more detailed analysis of the goal and target statements see Appendix 1).

The number of goals (17) and their accompanying targets (169) is comprehensive and reflects the range of substantial challenges facing all countries. Given this breadth, the ability of the proposed SDGs to provide clear direction and global priorities for the post-2015 development agenda is in question. Individually, each goal addresses a major challenge for development, but have the proposed targets been selected to drive the transformations required or to reflect all of the concerns expressed by those engaged in their formulation? Introducing sharper focus into the SDGs calls for both technical expertise to ensure a coherent and integrated framework and political expertise to ensure the final framework is supported by all member states.

Although a set of aspirational goal statements may be appropriate for the SDG framework, the targets need to indicate what the globally agreed objectives for sustainable development are for the period to 2030. Many of the targets proposed in the OWG outcome document are also aspirations. This raises questions about the practicability of some of them being achieved and the purpose they serve. Are they intended as global aspirations or as outcomes to be achieved? If it is the latter, then more work is needed to define realistic targets and means of implementation. Unfortunately, the OWG has not provided a vision of how their proposed framework should be used to achieve poverty eradication and advance sustainable development.

The aspirational nature of many of the targets, combined with a lack of definitions and quantitative character, makes most of them immeasurable in their current form. With further work some could be made into measurable targets. Measuring progress towards achievement of the global targets, however, also requires clarity about how global targets are to be interpreted by countries for their own post-2015 development agendas.

The intention is that governments will determine their own national targets towards the SDGs, according to country conditions and priorities. In many ways, this is what governments did with the MDGs, but shaped by dialogues over official development assistance (ODA) programming, which will have less import for achievement of the SDGs. And, crucially, the overall global headline targets were effectively free-standing and progress could be assessed by anyone with access to the relevant data. The accountability of governments for progress towards their nationally determined targets and towards globally agreed goals and targets, which has yet to be properly debated, will be a factor in the development of a more measurable framework of goals and targets. The organisational challenge in making this element of the architecture work is explored in section 3 below.

Many of the targets under the different goals in the OWG outcome document are relevant to the achievement of other goals. This integration reflects recognition by the OWG that actions taken towards one goal can also contribute to another goal, as well as efforts to mainstream cross-cutting issues such as gender and climate change. The integration, however, could be more thorough. The links between food production (Goal 2), for example, which accounts for 70% of global freshwater withdrawals, and the sustainable management of water resources (Goal 6) are not explicit.

During the process of negotiation and refinement of the goals and targets, links between goals could be used to identify how the number of targets could be minimised, though care should be taken to ensure critical links are retained and that inter-related targets are consistent with each other.

2.2 Specific goals

- **Goal 1**, *End poverty in all its forms everywhere*, is particularly important, and continuity in the headline target with the 2000 MDG1 makes sense. However, it may lose any kind of motivating power in the late stages of the time period if zero poverty is nearly achieved. And increasingly we see the argument that people living on \$2 a day can't reasonably be characterised as 'non-poor'. This suggests that there would be merit in adding a second poverty line and associated target – an 'extreme' poverty line (\$1.25) and a second 'ambitious' global poverty line set at double that value. The exact reduction level to target by 2030 would need some analytic work.
- The targets for **Goal 2**, *End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture*, echo the goal's aspirations, but may not be realistically achievable. Target 2.4, for example, is to 'ensure sustainable food-production systems' by 2030.
- **Goal 3**, *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*, retains objectives that were under three MDG goals and includes additional health objectives. Links with other goals, on environmental health challenges (pollution), for example, where non-medical actions are required, could be made more explicit.
- **Goal 4**, *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all*, includes some clear and ambitious targets, notably, 4.1 on universal secondary schooling by 2030. The weakness is that

the goal is (probably) unattainable in both a financial and arithmetic sense – Africa is nowhere near universal primary completion, let alone secondary.

- **Goal 5, *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls***, includes the aim to ‘achieve gender equality’ but does not mention men and boys. Some of the targets are unachievable (e.g. 5.2, ‘eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls’). Gender mainstreaming across all goals could be made more explicit.
- **Goal 6, *Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all***, goes beyond the MDG targets and includes targets for the sustainability of water resources. For access to safe drinking water and sanitation the emphasis is on physical access, and the OWG report does not clarify what is meant by ‘efficiency’ and ‘sustainability’. The resilience of water resources, particularly in the face of climate change, is a notable omission.
- ***Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all (Goal 7)*** goes further than the objectives of the [Sustainable Energy for All initiative](#) (SE4All), by calling for access to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy, but the target for renewable energy is weaker than the doubling called for by SE4ALL. The second and third targets are not critical to achievement of universal access to energy. The fossil-fuel subsidies target, now under Goal 12, is less specific about phasing out subsidies.
- **Goal 8, *Promote sustained, inclusive and economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all***, and **Goal 9, *Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation***, were considered strong in terms of goal statement and targets. Both goals recognise the importance of the productive sectors, which were omitted in the MDGs.
- ***Reduce inequality within and among countries (Goal 10)*** has a well-specified, measurable headline target and generally works well. More attention could be paid to the barriers faced by excluded groups across the whole goal set. There is a mismatch between the goal and the targets inasmuch as the goal aspires to reduce poverty both within and among nations while there is no target to measure inter-country inequality. [Recent evidence](#) suggests that the process of rapid convergence in national income between rich and poor countries that was a striking feature of the decade from 2000 to 2010 may be slowing considerably. So there is a strong case for a target on inequality between countries to measure progress.
- **Goal 11, *Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable***, recognises the importance of urbanisation. It was considered a strong goal but contained certain weaknesses in terms of measurability and the absence of targets around governance, inclusion, decentralisation, climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- ***Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns (SCP), Goal 12***, needs clarification: the targets are unrealistic (e.g. 12.2, ‘by 2030 achieve sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources’) and imprecise (12.5, ‘substantially reduce waste generation’). Almost by definition, SCP is cross-cutting, and links with the other goals are not made clear.
- The OWG has included a climate-change goal, ***Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts (Goal 13)***, but has indicated that climate-change objectives for the post-2015 development agenda should be agreed in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), not the United Nations General Assembly. As a result the level of ambition for climate-change objectives, under Goal 13 and in climate-change targets under other goals, is no greater than already exists in international agreements on

climate change, and for actions on climate-change mitigation the ambition is actually weaker. The OWG has missed an opportunity to state that responsibility to achieve climate-change objectives is wider than the UNFCCC.

- **Goal 14**, *Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*, was criticised for failing to live up to existing international agreements or previous discussions (the lack of numbers attached to targets, such as 14.1, ‘significantly reduce marine pollution’, 14.3, ‘minimize and address the impacts of ocean acidification’, and 14.6, ‘prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies’, was a particular weakness).
- **Goal 15**, *Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss*, was considered a particularly weak goal, failing to provide a clear, definitive, metric for concrete advancement of sustainable development.
- **Goal 16**, *Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels*, is highly aspirational and includes a wide number of targets that cover a very broad range of issues. However, few of these targets are easily measurable, which will make it difficult to track progress over time.
- **Goal 17** includes two objectives: *Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development*. ‘Means of implementation’ and ‘global partnership’ need clearer definitions as these terms mean different things to different people. Most of the targets under this goal are difficult to quantify, and in many cases it is not clear whether action is required at national or international level, and by which actors. Further, Goal 17 should be considered in conjunction with targets for means of implementation under each goal (making over 40 targets). As it stands there is some overlap and scope for rationalisation.

3 Making it work

The OWG proposal for SDG goals and targets is broader and deeper than the MDGs. Its breadth lays out a conceptual challenge, as we have already discussed: is it too broad to be meaningful? But it also lays out an operational challenge. We know from the experience of the follow-ups to the human-rights conferences of the 1990s (for example the [Beijing World Conference on Women, 1995](#), and the [Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development, 1995](#)) and the workings of other multinational processes such as the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#) that gathering contributions to multilateral processes at an in-country level can be a difficult and lengthy process.

A quick review of the OWG text reveals that the complexity of the task that would be required to provide active motivation, commensuration, back-up and monitoring of progress on the proposed SDG framework would be several orders of magnitude greater than it has been for the MDGs.

The proposed SDG set is bigger and more complex than the MDG set on the following dimensions:

1. **number of goals and targets.** The OWG proposal outlines 17 goals and 169 targets. The original 2000 MDG set had eight goals and 18 targets. This evolved over time to the present eight goals and 21 targets.
2. **substantive reach.** The MDGs were predominantly focused on human-development outcomes (although there was some evolution over their lifespan – one significant change for example was the addition of target 1b on employment and decent work). By contrast the SDG set goes much further into the following territories: sustainable growth; resilient infrastructure; reducing inequality; sustainable consumption; climate action; managing marine and terrestrial environments; peace promotion and violence reduction; and accountable and responsive governance.
3. **universal country coverage.** The ‘absolute deprivation’ spin of the MDGs implied a focus on monitoring outcomes in the poorest countries. Even given this narrowing of potential scope, it has been difficult to get a reliable picture of some areas due to the general absence of reliable data (for example maternal mortality). And even though expanding the scope to wealthier countries should not pose great challenges of monitoring capacity, it may entail political challenges. Not all developed countries have an official poverty measure, for example.
4. **subsidiarity.** There was a unified global target set for the MDGs, so measurement could be carried out centrally (or in fact by anyone with access to the data) without reference to national planning and policy frameworks. By contrast the OWG set is a mix of, on the one hand, targets which have been set centrally (for example 1.1 on poverty or 10.1 on inequality), are globally applicable, and would function just as the old MDG set - and on the other hand, a large number of targets that would need to be defined through national policy processes. To take only the example of Goal 1, this would apply to targets 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 (which is arguably immeasurable through any imaginable process, national or otherwise) and 1.5.

There is a range of political, organisational and managerial challenges in moving from the MDG model to the SDG model. Greater substantive coverage for example will create formidable challenges for the collection of data in many areas where the national and global information base is weak. But by far the greatest challenges relate to the subsidiarity issue. This is also a huge step-change in terms of the tasks required at the centre to make the architecture of goals and target meaningful. At the global level a central capability set would be required (which might reside in one organisational space or in multiple), which would need to carry out a demanding range of tasks of a politico-technical nature. These would include:

- **provoking action** by unwilling or insufficiently capable national governments. Many of the goals and targets would imply that specific countries should move into new areas of national policy and legislation. Where legislative change is required (much of Goal 15 in many countries, for example) it could not be assumed that action would be fast. The sheer task-load of setting national targets in a possible 100 policy areas would clearly be intimidating – and not all national policy systems have a central location (Planning Commission, Cabinet Office or empowered Ministry of Finance) that would be a natural location for dialogue and action. Finally, there are real risks that setting out such a demanding agenda for aspirational policy and legislative change could overload national policy and planning systems.
- **negotiating acceptable ‘offers’ of national targets.** If any proposal is automatically accepted for a national target under a given goal then there is a risk that the process will rapidly lose meaning and credibility. In areas such as natural-resource conservation, inequality or accountable governance, powerful national and local interests are likely to seek to influence processes to produce a low level of ambition and practical action in the targets. But multilateral structures of a technical nature are rarely empowered to ‘push back’ when

national governments produce their proposals, so this will be a significant challenge to the workability of the system as a whole.

- **collating targets and commensurating results.** The complexity of the database of targets could be intimidating (given that we might be dealing with over a hundred targets requiring national-level specification). To move from that to the necessary task of producing a monitoring narrative (whether yearly or at greater intervals) will require some complex processes of commensuration in terms of both data and narratives of national performance.

There is a serious risk that the whole goal architecture will prove unworkable. The process of thinking through the SDGs has already produced clear and positive changes in the global norms which it would be damaging to lose. When the OWG was convened few imagined that a set of governmental representatives representing 69 countries could agree a goal and targets around inequality, for example. And the debates around climate have surely helped to generate a growing optimism that the Paris Conference of Parties (CoP) in 2015 might actually produce a meaningful climate deal. In this context it is important that the SDG project does not fail.

The challenge of ensuring the SDGs are achievable has two key implications;

- **Firstly** it means simplification. An effort to consolidate and combine some of the goals would be welcome. But at least as important is a simplification of the target set. And beyond the simplification of the overall framework there is also a need to align expectations of what countries will produce with a realistic view of their capacity. It would be better to work systematically through the process of setting a small number of targets than to seek to deliver national commitments in every area at once (and in any case that is simply not going to happen in many countries).
- **Secondly** it means that the countries and institutions which have driven the process need to turn their attention to the capabilities that will be needed to carry out the tasks listed above on a global scale – of stimulating action, negotiating targets, of supporting data collection and analysis and of collating and commensurating results. It is a much more challenging agenda to deliver than the UN faced for the MDGs.

The General Assembly has resolved ([resolution 68/309, 10 September 2014](#)) that the OWG report should be the main basis for integrating SDGs into the post-2015 development agenda. The Secretary-General's synthesis report, expected in November, will need to provide guidance for the intergovernmental process leading up to an agreement in 2015. This guidance will need to build on the many positive elements to be found in the OWG proposal as well as address its shortcomings and provide clarity on how the SDGs should be used by member states.

Appendix 1

Programme teams from across the institute¹ were asked to reflect on the OWG's outcome document. A simple template was circulated to capture broad perspectives.

Goals 1-16 were treated as a package, with Goal 17 appraised separately.

ODI researchers were asked to reflect on the outcome document in three ways: review the goal statement, the target statements and the package as a whole (i.e. the goal and targets together).

- The goal statements, by and large, were considered aspirational and transformative in ambition.
- The majority of targets were considered immeasurable. Any goal with 'significantly increase' as a quantifier, or that used language like 'ensure fair and equitable', was deemed problematic. The absence of measurability will make action difficult.
- There is a recurrent concern that the means of implementing targets (the a, b and c and targets under Goal 17) will not, by themselves, be enough to achieve the goals.

Goals:

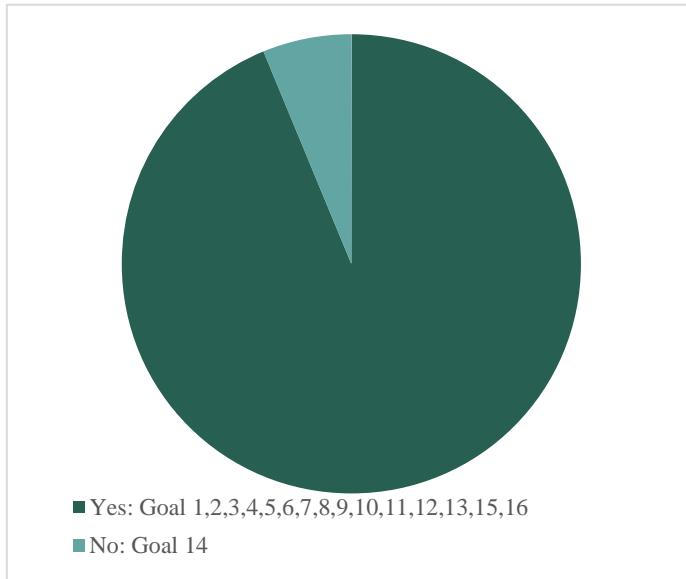
When assessing the goal statement the programme teams were asked to consider four questions:

- does the goal address a major/priority challenge for sustainable development?
- is the goal aspirational?
- is the goal easy to understand and communicate?
- is the goal universal i.e. relevant to all countries?

Does the goal address a major/priority challenge for sustainable development?

Of Goals 1-16, all bar Goal 14 (*Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*) were deemed to address a major/priority challenge for sustainable development. The wording of Goal 14 is not clear enough about sustainable development challenges.

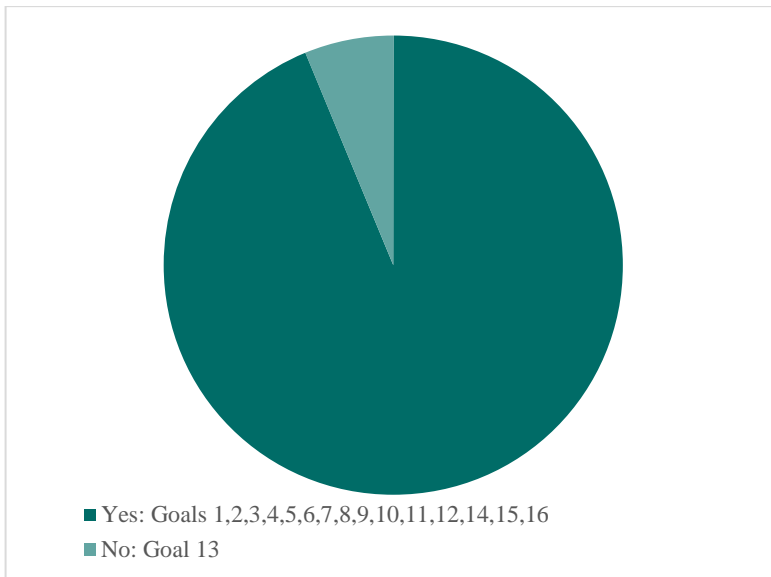
¹ Agriculture Development and Policy, Centre for Aid and Public Expenditure, Climate and Environment Programme, Growth Poverty and Inequality, International Economic Development Group, Politics and Governance, Social Development, Water Policy



Is the goal aspirational?

Of Goals 1-16, all bar Goal 13 (*Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*) were deemed sufficiently aspirational.

Goal 13's statement was considered to be about action to address the challenge of climate change, and not a specific climate-change outcome, such as increase in global average temperature, emission reduction or the building of adaptive capacity. This is probably a consequence of the fact that the global response to climate change is negotiated at the UNFCCC, which seems to undermine recognition of climate change as a concern for other international agreements.



Is the Goal easy to understand and communicate?

Of Goals 1-16, 11 were deemed easy to understand and communicate (Goals 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14).

Three were considered difficult to understand and communicate. Goal 6 (*Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all*) was criticised for placing emphasis on the physical availability of water and risks downplaying the importance of secure access. In addition, ‘ensuring availability’ is an outcome of ‘sustainable management’ –the statement was deemed to mix means and ends.

Goal 15 (*Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss*) was also considered difficult to understand and communicate, and was thought to be in need of simplification.

Goal 16 (*Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels*) was also criticised for the complexity of language used.

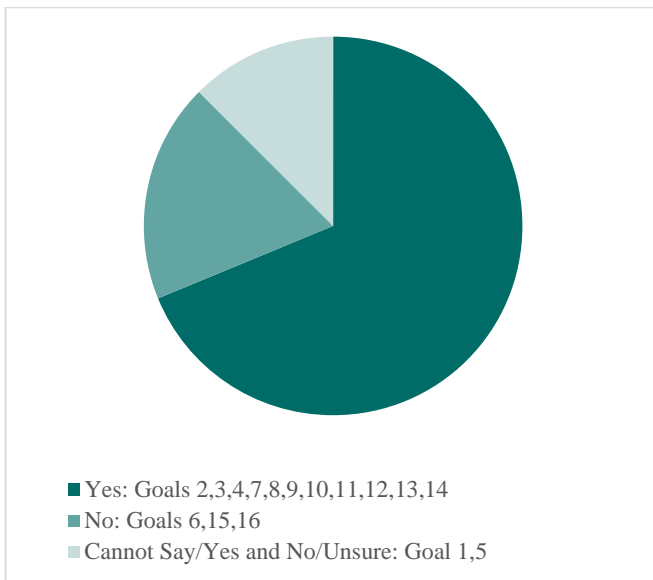
This question was considered difficult to answer for two goals. Goal 1 (*End poverty in all its forms everywhere*) was thought to encompass a mix of absolute and relative poverty measures. The aspiration to end poverty is only applicable to absolute poverty. The notion that a global absolute poverty line can be identified has some empirical basis, particularly in the work of Martin Ravallion and Shaohua Chen (e.g. [The developing world is poorer than we thought, but no less successful in the fight against poverty](#)). It is based on the observation that the poorest countries in the world all have very similar poverty lines.

However, it is in the nature of relative poverty measures that they are never reduced to zero. The whole point of relative poverty measures is to outline standards of living insufficient for social participation/membership in the society concerned ([Adam Smith’s ‘linen shirt’](#)). These inevitably change as the society gets wealthier. An outside toilet was socially acceptable in urban centres in the UK in the 1950s; it’s not now, and would be a marker of poverty.

It was argued that the right to set out what poverty means in the context of any given country is integral to national sovereignty. The following re-formulations were suggested.

- End extreme poverty everywhere, and raise living standards of the poorest people in all countries
- End extreme poverty globally, and reduce by half poverty in all countries according to national definitions.

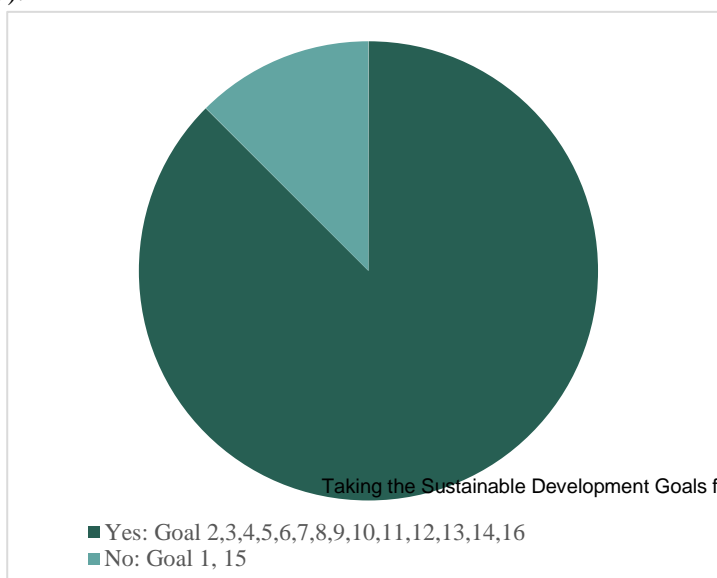
The language used for Goal 5 (*Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*) was considered open to interpretation – it is a potentially complex arena, and empowerment requires working in an integrated way across several sectors. There may be calls for the e ‘equity’ (substantive equality) arguments, which are currently implicit, to be made explicit.



Is the goal universal i.e. relevant to all countries?

Of Goals 1-16, 14 were considered universal, i.e. relevant to all countries. Two were thought to fall short of universality. For Goal 1 (*End poverty in all its forms everywhere*), in order to achieve universality of salience for all countries, national measures are included under Target 1.2. But there are two problems here: firstly, countries may wish to raise their own poverty measures continually, in which case ‘reducing to half’ will not work. Secondly, the target (‘Reduce to half’) is out of line with the goal (*End poverty in all its forms everywhere*).

Goal 15 (restore and sustainable use terrestrial ecosystems) deemed to fall universality.



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Targets:

Programme teams were asked to consider five questions when assessing the target statements.

- Are the targets measurable?
- Are the targets consistent with international agreements (if applicable)?
- Are the targets universal, but adaptable to country contexts?
- Are the targets action-oriented (i.e. is it clear what needs to be done to deliver on the targets)?
- Are the targets achievable?

Are the targets measurable?

Of the targets associated with Goals 1-16, five target sets were considered measurable (Goals 3, 5, 7, 8 and 9), targets for seven were considered difficult or impossible to measure (Goals 2, 4, 6, 12, 13, 15 and 16). The question was thought difficult to answer for targets associated with four goals (1, 10, 11 and 14).

The targets associated with Goal 2 (End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture), were criticised for not being measurable.

Goal 4 was praised for the inclusion of some clear and ambitious targets, notably 4.1, 'universal secondary schooling by 2030'. However, the use of words like 'quality' and 'relevant' that have no measurable quality attached was deemed problematic.

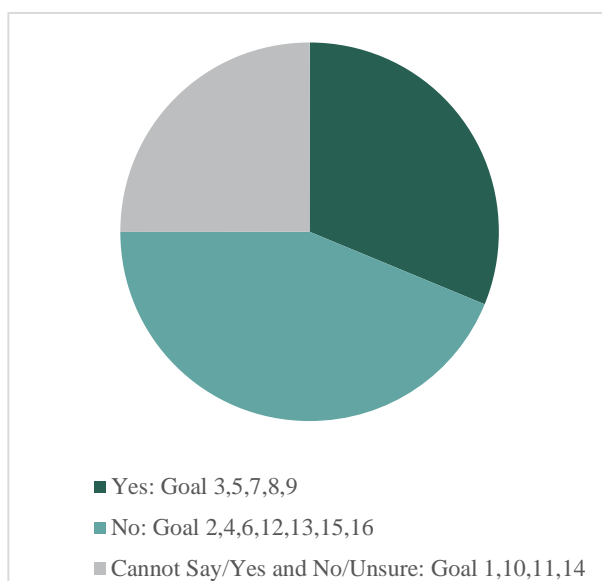
Goal 6 had some strong targets (6.1, 'universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all', and 6.2, 'achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all'), and included some areas omitted from the MDGs (hygiene and water pollution). However, there were weaknesses: Target 6.5 on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) was considered unnecessary and not a target, rather a means to an end. Target 6.6 on ecosystems was thought difficult to measure. Finally, 6a ('expand international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries') and 6b ('support and strengthen the participation of local communities for improving water and sanitation management') were considered warmly persuasive but too vague and ultimately unnecessary.

The targets that accompanied Goal 12 were broadly condemned for their lack of measurability. Whilst the themes chosen for the targets were considered critical for the achievement of the goal, without clearly measurable targets it is difficult to comment further. Only one of these had a specific measurable quantity attached (12.3 ‘by 2030 halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer level’).

Goal 14 was criticised for its failure to attach numbers to some of the targets, such as ‘significantly reduce marine pollution’, ‘minimize and address the impacts of ocean acidification’, ‘prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies’, and ‘increase the economic benefits to Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) from the sustainable use of marine resources’. Reduce, minimise and increase by how much? Address how? ‘Certain forms’ – which ones? A stronger, more precise language would make the targets more substantial and ambitious. It was commented that, during discussions, the level of ambition of some of these targets had been watered down.

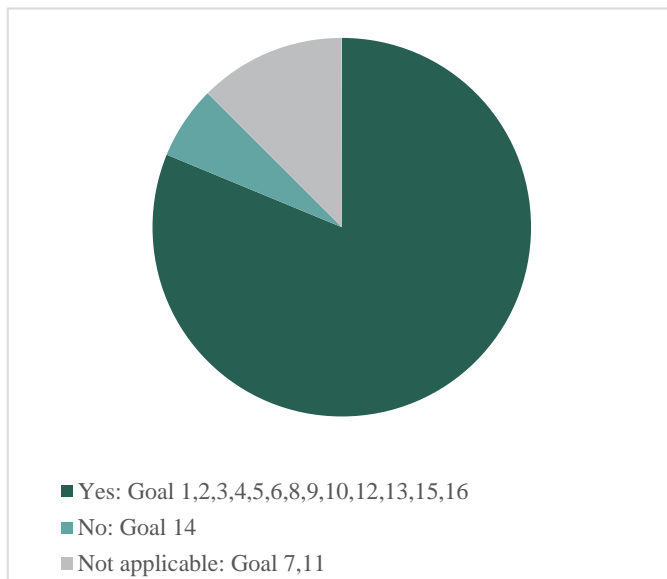
In terms of Goal 15, both the targets were deemed largely immeasurable. Any target with ‘significantly increase’ as a quantifier was considered inherently immeasurable. Worse still were targets that include the wording ‘ensure fair and equitable’, since it entirely skirts the value judgement (necessary for policy decision-making) of what constitutes fair and equitable. The absence of measurability makes action quite hard.

The targets associated with Goal 16, while aspirational, remain more like goal statements themselves e.g. 16.5, ‘substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all its forms’. A number of indicators could be developed and adapted to country contexts, but this would still remain an ambiguous objective.



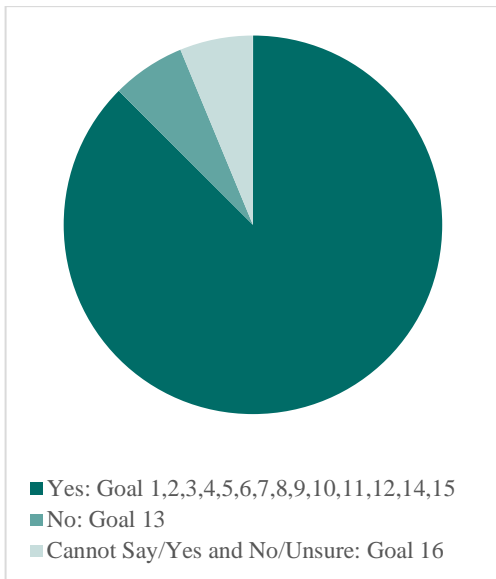
Are the targets consistent with international agreements (if applicable)?

Of the targets associated with Goals 1-16, Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15 and 16 were deemed consistent with international agreements. Goal 14 (*Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*) was thought to fall short of the standards outlined by the Durban Action Plan. For Goals 7 and 11, this question was not considered applicable.



Are the targets universal, but adaptable to country contexts?

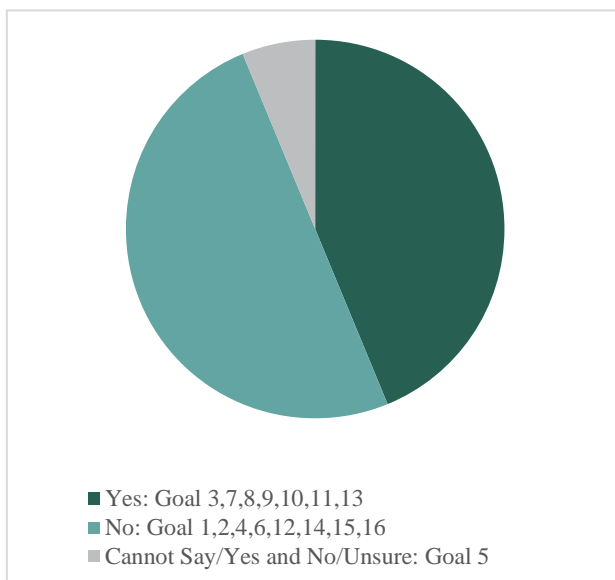
Of the targets associated with Goals 1-16, targets for Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14 and 15 were considered to be sufficiently universal, yet adaptable to country contexts. For Goal 1, the confusion over absolute versus relative poverty needs to be resolved to ensure the universality dimension will stand up to the test of time. The targets associated with Goal 13 (*Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*) were not considered universal because the means cited for the implementation of targets have been aimed at specific categories of country. Finally, the question was considered difficult to answer for those targets associated with Goal 16.



Are the targets action oriented (i.e. is it clear what needs to be done to deliver on the targets)?

Of the targets associated with Goals 1-16, those linked to Goals 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 13 were deemed sufficiently action-oriented. The targets associated with eight of the goals (1, 2, 4, 6, 12, 14, 15 and 16) were deemed, on aggregate, not to be sufficiently actionable.

A recurrent criticism of the targets linked to Goals 1, 2, 4, 6, 12, 14, 15 and 16 is that without clear, measurable criteria it is difficult to comment on whether they are action-oriented. One recurrent criticism levelled against targets was that they are actions themselves rather than the outcome following action.



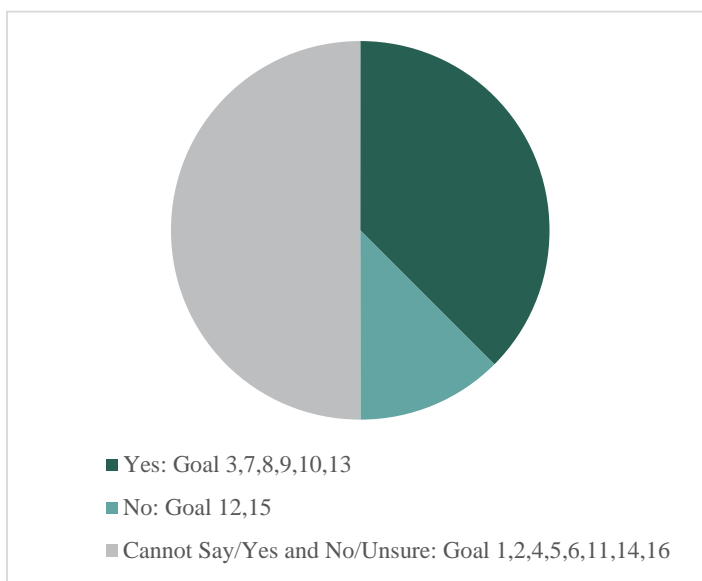
Are the targets achievable?

Of the targets associated with Goals 1-16, six were considered achievable (Goals 3, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 13), and two were thought unachievable (Goals 12 and 15). For Goal 15, two alternative targets were suggested that, together, provide an alternative to the very multi-target approach under the existing goal. These targets encapsulate 90% of what the current framing is trying to capture:

- ‘eradicate biodiversity loss’ (or, less ambitiously, ‘half the rate of biodiversity loss’)
- ‘zero the rate of deforestation’ (inadequately captures terrestrial ecosystem quality measures, but, combined with biodiversity, is a useful proxy; a stronger target would be to have a net afforestation goal, since it will be needed in any case).

Of the remaining eight (Goals 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 11, 14 and 16), contributors indicated that they were unable to judge whether the targets were achievable or not given the absence of measurable targets and indicators, and the fact that actions are unqualified – the level or proportional change in action are not specified.

Comments on Goal 4’s targets illustrate another type of criticism. In this case, the goal was seen to include some clear and ambitious targets, notably 4.3 and universal secondary schooling by 2030. The weakness is that the goal and attendant targets are (probably) unattainable in both a financial and arithmetic sense: Africa is nowhere near universal primary completion, let alone secondary.



The Package

Programme teams were asked to consider five questions when assessing the package (goals and targets as a whole).

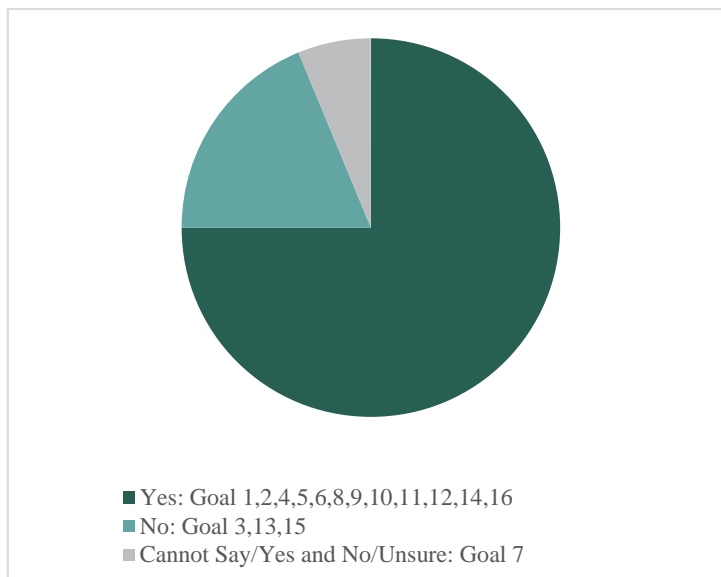
- Is the package transformative?

- Does the package reflect social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development?
- Is it comprehensive: spells out a critical sustainable-development challenge and provides a normative framework to address it?
- Is the package applicable to all stakeholders (governments at all levels, business, civil society, international organisations etc.)?
- Are the means to achieve the goals clear (i.e. means of implementation)?
- Does the package allow for global and national application?

Is the package transformative?

Of Goals 1-16, the following goal and target sets were considered transformative (Goal 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14 and 16). Goal and target sets 3, 13 and 15 were considered to fall short of being transformative. The package of goal and targets for Goal 3 was considered more applicable to middle- and high-income countries, focusing on health dimensions and technologies and less so on issues affecting health access and quality including gendered social norms and structural barriers to access. There was also a failure to note the potential roles of the private or informal sectors, particularly community-level agents, who have proven to be critical in both stimulating health service demand and addressing supply constraints.

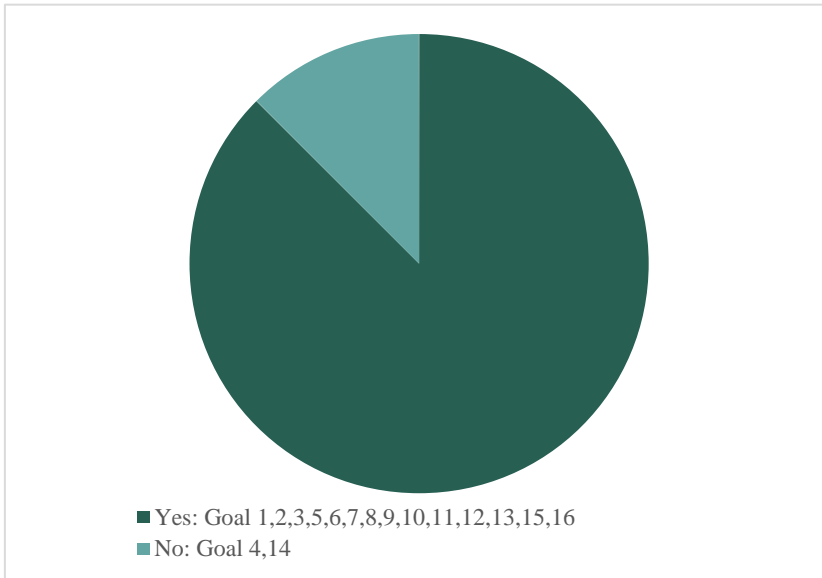
Goal 13 and its targets were criticised for failing to show the level of ambition required to move the debate forward; the package failed to add to what had already been agreed in any significant or transformative way. Finally, for Goal 15 it was stated that the framework did not provide a format that could guide international action towards transformation.



Does the package reflect social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development?

The majority of goals and targets sets (fourteen out of sixteen) were considered to reflect the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development adequately; specifically 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15 and 16 were considered to do so. Only Goal/Target sets 4 and 14 were thought to fall short of this ambition. Goal 14 in particular was considered weak. This goal and target set was criticised for removing some of the social language of initial conversations. For example, there is no mention of participatory

coastal management, gender equality or human rights. One could conclude that it is not comprehensive and does not address all the sustainable-development aspects derived from the use of the oceans, seas and marine sources.



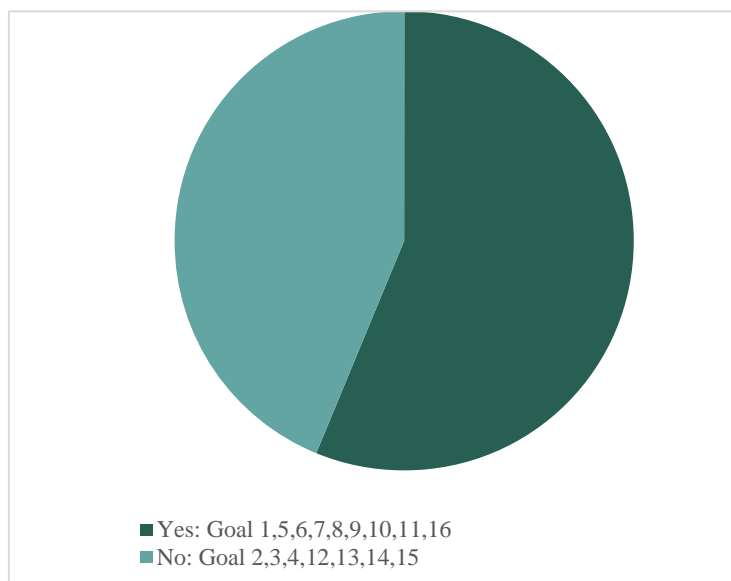
Is it comprehensive: spells out a critical sustainable-development challenge and provides a normative framework to address it?

Of Goals and Target sets 1-16, nine were considered comprehensive, spelling out a critical sustainable-development challenge and providing a normative framework to address it (Goal and Target sets 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 16). Of the goal/target sets, six were considered to fall short of spelling out a critical sustainable-development challenge (2, 3, 4, 12, 13, 14 and 15).

A common criticism levelled against these packages was articulated with reference to Goal/Target set 2. Here, the target statements were broadly criticised, as was the level of measurability, accountability and motivation.

1. **Target statements:** the targets are not actually targets – they are vision statements that are very broad and aspirational rather than concrete and achievable. They include blanket statements like 2.1, ‘end hunger...’ and 2.2, ‘end all forms of malnutrition...’ which are not realistically achievable.
2. **Measurement:** some of the target statements:
 - a) are not measurable (e.g. 2.4, ‘ensure sustainable food-production systems’; 2.5, ‘ensure access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the utilization of genetic resources’; or
 - b) need to be more specific to be meaningful (e.g. 2a, ‘increase investment... in rural infrastructure... [and other things]’. By how much to see that the goal has been met?
 - c) arbitrary numbers might not be achievable in some situations (e.g. 2.3, ‘double agricultural productivity... of small-scale producers’ – in some countries, such as Malawi, this may be achievable, but in other areas e.g. South-East Asia, small-scale producer productivity is already very high. There needs to be a more nuanced target to be useful in country contexts.
3. **Accountability and motivation:** who will be accountable and who will be motivated to achieve these goal/target sets?

The goal/target package for Goal 13 was considered to be particularly weak, failing to provide the means to achieve the goal because it does not include a target on mitigation or the avoidance of dangerous climate change.



Could the package be applicable to all stakeholders (governments at all levels, business, civil society, international organisations etc.)?

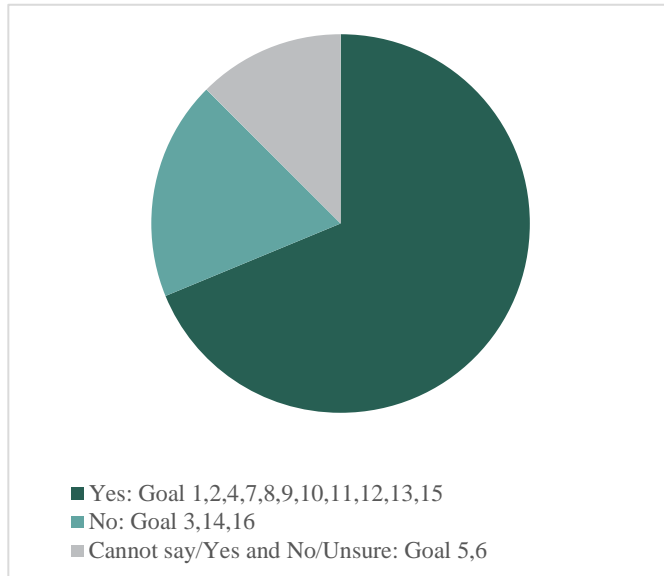
Of Goal/Target sets 1-16, 11 (1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 15) were considered potentially applicable to all stakeholders (governments at all levels, business, civil society, international organisations, etc.). Three were considered not applicable to all stakeholders (3, 14 and 16). Goal/Target set 3 was criticised for failing to reference the potential role of the private sector. Similarly, the role of the informal sector was ignored, in particular that of community-level agents, who have proven to be critical in both stimulating demand and addressing supply constraints.

Goal/Target set 14 was criticised for a number of reasons. Global governance organisations were seen to lack the authority and capacity to guarantee compliance and enforcement of existing ocean laws. Similarly, local, national, regional and international governing bodies have failed to keep pace with developments in extractive technologies, in particular developments in illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

Beyond the agreed 200 nautical miles from state coastlines covered by United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) lie international waters of the high seas, global commons that cover 45% of the Earth's surface. Here, there is no single law or authority protecting the last remaining global commons on Earth. This is a resource used freely by all, but owned and protected by no one. Both IUU fishing that goes on within Exclusive Economic Zones of many developing countries and what happens in international waters are major problems that this goal and these targets fail to address.

Goal and Target set 16 was criticised for not being particularly politically feasible, given its broad nature (e.g. *End all violence everywhere*), which governments in developed and developing countries would be reluctant to commit to.

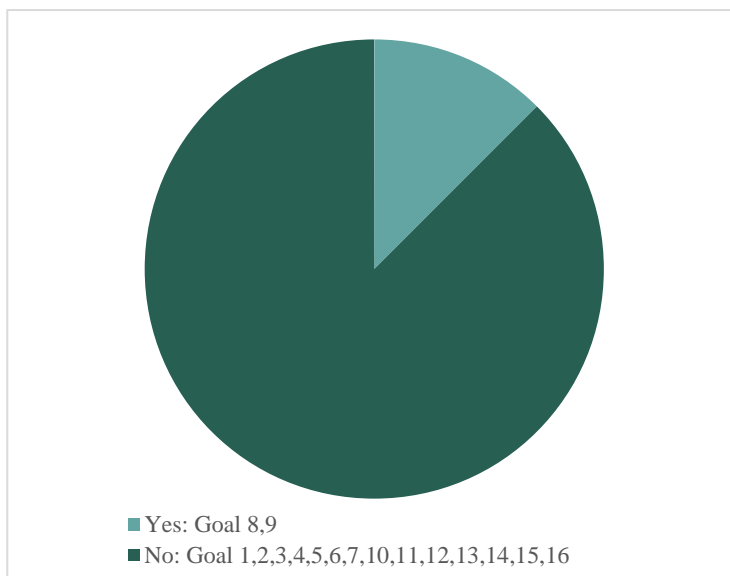
For two of the goal sets, the question was considered difficult to answer, Goals 5 and 6.



Are the means to achieve the goals clear (i.e. means of implementation)?

Of Goal/Target sets 1-16, only two were thought to identify clearly the means to achieve the goals (i.e. means of implementation): Goal/Target sets 8 and 9. The remaining 13 (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16) failed to identify the means to achieve the goals.

There is a recurrent concern that the means of implementation targets (the a, b and c targets and Goal 17, which was assessed separately) will not by themselves be enough to achieve the goals. It is therefore hard to assess how achievable these targets are. Given the level of ambition and lack of clear, measurable time bound indicators, it seems highly unlikely that all countries would achieve all of these targets. Again, each target itself seems more akin to a goal, and would need clear indicators and data sets underneath. They also do not seem to be particularly politically feasible, given the broad nature of many of the targets.

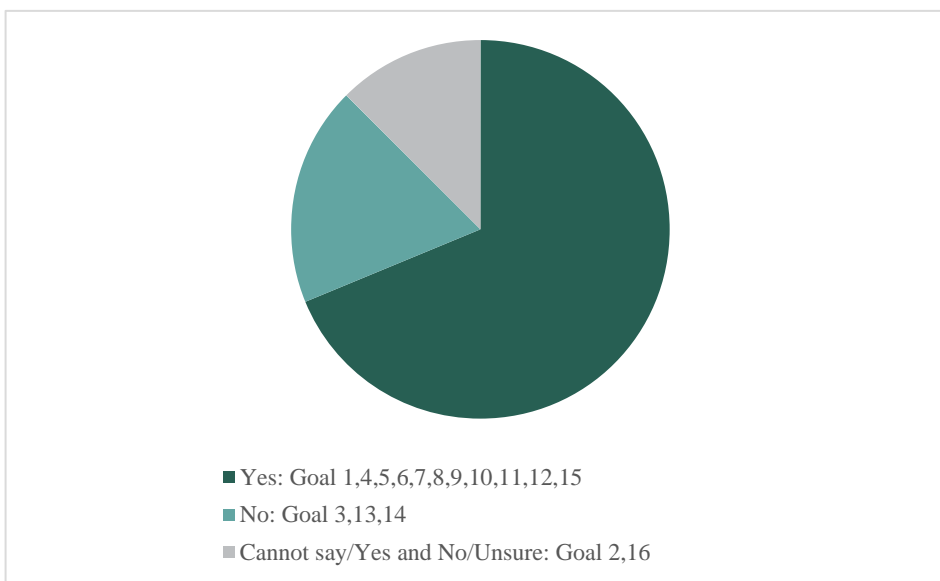


Does the package allow for global and national application?

Of the Goal/Target sets 1-16, 10 were seen to allow for global and national application (1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 15). Three were not thought to allow for global and national application, (3, 13 and 14).

Goal/Target set 3 was criticised for an apparent focus on middle- and high-income countries. Some of the target areas were considered less relevant or less of a priority for developing countries (e.g. substance abuse versus maternal and child mortality). Goal/Target set 13 was seen to focus on national-level actions – it was acknowledged that the UNFCCC is stated to be the forum for international agreement. Goal/Target set 14 was criticised for reasons stated above, i.e. a failure to mobilise either international or national action.

The question was considered difficult to answer for Goal/Target sets 2 and 6.



Goal 17

Goal 17 was

approached separately, given its focus on the means of implementation and the global partnership for sustainable development, both enablers to achieve the other goals. A reduced set of questions was circulated with a focus on the targets and the goal package.

Programme teams were asked to consider four questions when assessing the target statements.

- Are the targets measurable?
- Are the targets consistent with international agreements (if applicable)?
- Are the targets action-oriented (i.e. is it clear what needs to be done to deliver on the targets)?
- Are the targets achievable?

Teams were asked to consider two questions when assessing the package (goals and targets as a whole).

- Is the package transformative?
- Is it comprehensive?

Three general criticisms can be levelled against Goal 17 and its 19 targets. Firstly, the goal statement is really two goals: 1. *Strengthen the means of implementation* and 2. *Revitalize the global partnership*. Neither is defined, and these phrases can mean different things to different people.

Secondly, the targets are all worded as actions and not outcomes (strengthen, promote, enhance, etc.) and the majority are immeasurable (exception, for example, is 17.2, which was in the MDGs). It is not clear in many cases whether action is required at an international level or at a national level.

Thirdly, Goal 17 needs to be read in conjunction with the means of implementation targets under the other goals. There are 43 of these. They complement, if not duplicate, the targets in Goal 17 with: one on multi-stakeholder partnerships, four on trade, 10 on technology, 10 on policy coherence, 11 on finance and 16 on capacity-building. There are none on data. (The total is greater than 43 because some relate to more than one section in Goal 17.) There is some duplication between targets (e.g. on information and communications technology), and there is scope to rationalise in conjunction with the Goal 17 targets.

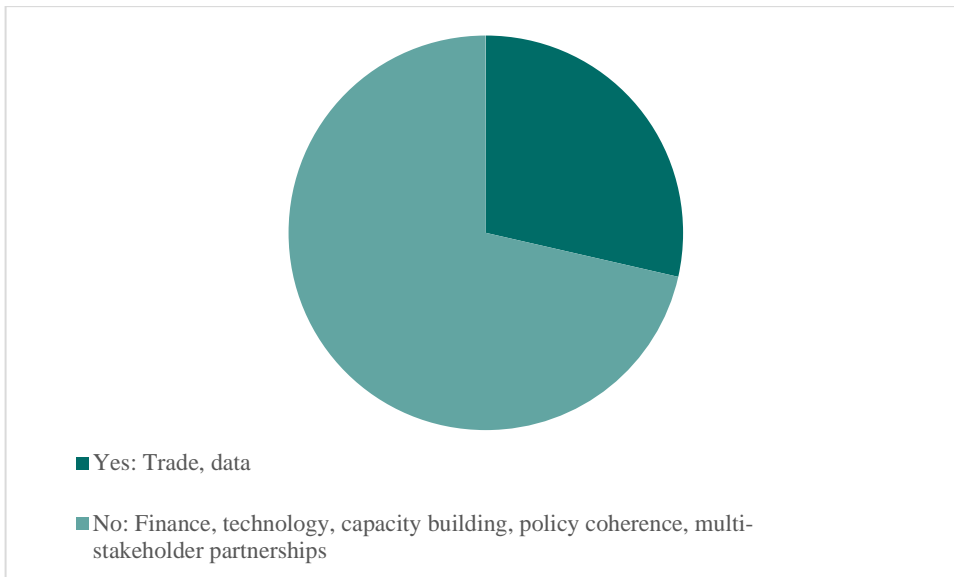
Targets

Are the targets measurable?

Targets associated with trade and data, monitoring and accountability components of Goal 17 were considered to be broadly measurable. Target 17.18 was seen to reinforce and build upon the 2011 Busan Action Plan for Statistics (BAPS), itself a successor to the 2004 Marrakesh Action Plan, in two ways – first, in the types of disaggregation it specifies (BAPS focused on sex disaggregation) and in its emphasis on measures of progress that ‘complement GDP’.

The first target (17.18) is very specific and useful; the types of disaggregation it specifies are critical to the overall aim of ‘leaving no one behind’ and to building national statistical capacities. The second target (17.19) is too vague to be useful – ‘build on existing initiatives’ is weak, and the call to develop measures that ‘complement GDP’ is equally ambiguous. The call to support statistical capacity in developing countries is already contained in target 7.18.

The remainder of targets were considered to be immeasurable (finance, technology, capacity-building, policy and institutional coherence, multi-stakeholder partnerships). The language for the targets was considered extremely vague e.g. Target 17.3, ‘mobilize additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources’.

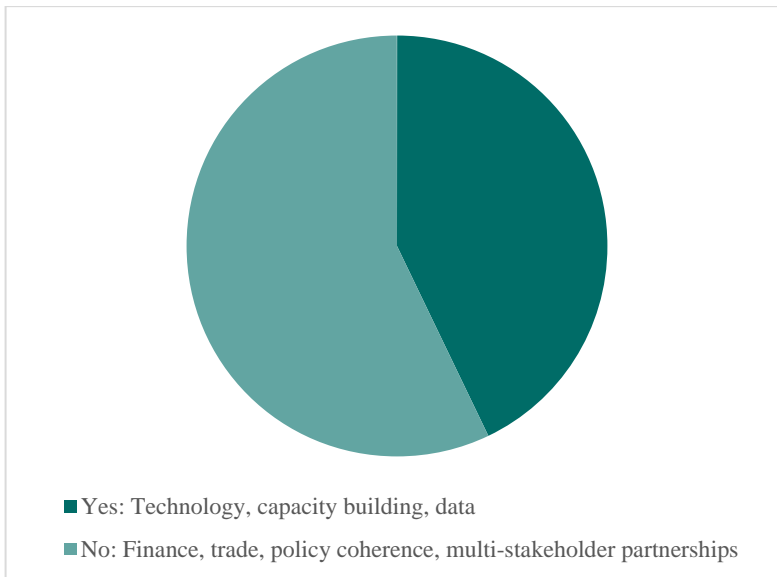


Are the targets consistent with international agreements (if applicable)?

Where applicable, targets were considered broadly consistent with international agreements (finance, technology, trade and data components). The question was not thought applicable to capacity-building, policy and institutional coherence, and multi-stakeholder partnership components.

Are the targets action oriented (i.e. is it clear what needs to be done to deliver on the targets)?

The weakness of Goal 17, and a recurrent criticism of areas of the SDGs, is that it is not clear what needs to be done to deliver on the targets. Of the components, technology, capacity-building and data were considered action-oriented. However, finance, trade, policy and institutional coherence and multi-stakeholder partnership components were not considered action-oriented. The use of vague or ambiguous language was thought to make it difficult to see how they would be measured or what action would be needed to be taken in order to meet them.



Are the targets achievable?

Of the targets associated with Goal 17, those linked to finance, trade, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and data, monitoring and accountability were considered, on balance, achievable. Whilst these targets were deemed achievable one recurrent query asked was who would be accountable? The question was thought difficult to answer for three components: technology, capacity-building and policy and institutional coherence.

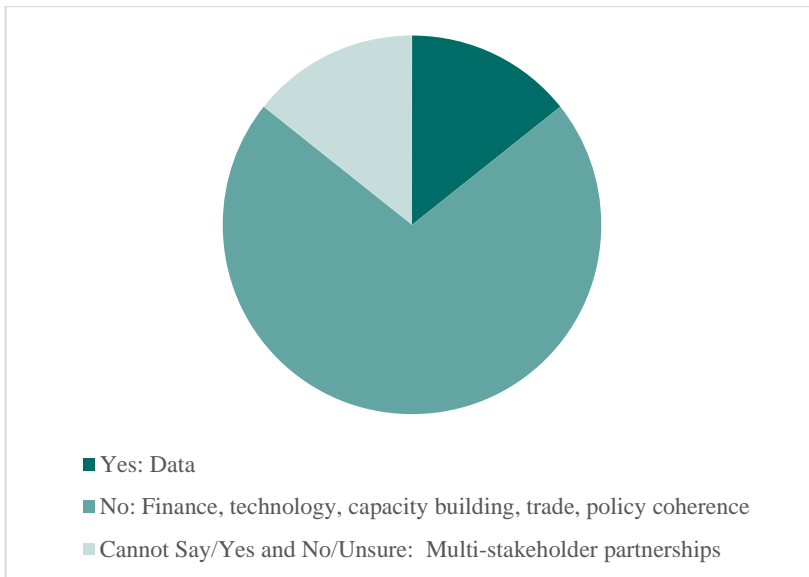
The Package

Is the package transformative?

The Goal/Target set 17 was considered, on balance, not to be transformative, while the data, monitoring and accountability component was deemed transformative. Target 7.19, calling for the improvement of disaggregated data (and for building systems that can report on that), has the potential to be truly transformative and will be crucial in monitoring efforts to leave no one behind. The current focus on the need for a ‘data revolution’ and the initiatives that are likely to result from this could give the impetus needed to make this achievable.

However, finance, technology, capacity-building, trade and policy and institutional coherence were deemed to fall short of being transformative. One recurrent criticism was that the combination of targets was not specific or ambitious enough to be transformative.

The question was considered difficult to answer for the multi-stakeholder partnership component. It was suggested that the goal and targets should include a much clearer articulation of what is meant by partnership and what the expectations are for different groups within partnerships, at both global and national level. The different groups of actors expected to participate in global and national level partnerships should make clear commitments. The question of who would be accountable was also thought to impact upon the transformative potential of this goal.



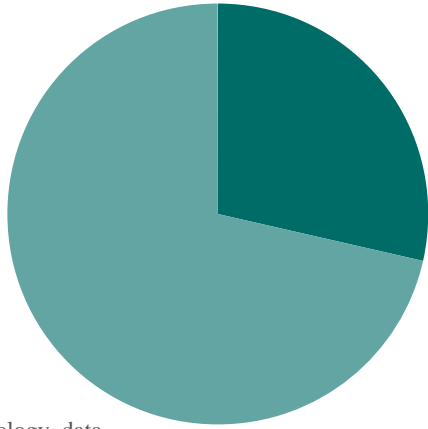
Is it comprehensive?

The Goal/Target set 17 was, on balance, not considered to be comprehensive. While technology and data components were deemed comprehensive, this was not the case for finance, capacity-building, trade, policy and institutional coherence and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Criticism of the financing component focused on the need for more specific goals and targets that are measurable, ambitious and achievable, for all groups of actors. At present, the targets are considerably less ambitious than those included in MDG8. A significant failing of Goal 17 was the lack of targets that focused on the quality of aid provided, not just the quantity. (MDG Goal 8 includes targets on aid allocation by sector and income grouping and on aid untying, which are not in the current SDG proposal.)

Goal 17 also requires a focus on goals and targets which are more clearly related to the SDGs, specifying in detail either the resources required to meet the SDGs, or specific changes in the way that finance is mobilised, allocated and spent in order to meet the SDGs.

There is a need for goals and targets that apply to a wider group of finance providers, including civil society organisations, the private sector and to encourage south-south cooperation.



■ Yes: Technology, data

■ No: Finance, capacity, trade, policy cohesion, multi-stakeholder partnerships



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