

## PRIMER #2: THE OPEN WORKING GROUP ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

### WHAT ARE THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS?

At the UN Conference on Sustainable Development or “Rio+20,” held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, the 193 UN Member States agreed to create an inclusive and transparent intergovernmental process to develop global sustainable development goals (SDGs) to be agreed by the UN General Assembly (GA). The Open Working Group (OWG) on SDGs was thus officially established in January 2013, and will present its findings to the GA by September 2014. According to the decision at Rio+20, the SDGs must address and incorporate economic, social and environmental considerations in a balanced way. The goals will be universal in nature – meaning that they will apply to all countries – but will be adapted to national realities and circumstances. The SDGs will most likely include goals and targets on major current and emerging development challenges, such as those discussed during the thematic meetings of the OWG (see Box 1).

**Box 1**

OWG THEMES	Click the links for the Technical Support Team issues brief for each OWG topic:
<b>OWG 2, 17-19 April 2013</b>	<a href="#">Poverty Eradication</a>
<b>OWG 3, 22-24 May 2013</b>	<a href="#">Food Security and Nutrition;</a> <a href="#">Sustainable Agriculture;</a> <a href="#">Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought;</a> <a href="#">Water and Sanitation.</a>
<b>OWG 4, 17-19 June 2013</b>	<a href="#">Employment and Decent Work;</a> <a href="#">Social Protection;</a> <a href="#">Education and Culture;</a> <a href="#">Health and Sustainable Development;</a> <a href="#">Population Dynamics.</a>
<b>OWG 5, 25-27 November 2013</b>	<a href="#">Sustained and Inclusive Growth, Infrastructure Development, and Industrialization;</a> <a href="#">Macroeconomic Policy Questions;</a> <a href="#">Energy.</a>
<b>OWG 6, 9-13 December 2013</b>	<a href="#">Means of Implementation.</a> <a href="#">Global Partnership for achieving sustainable development;</a> <a href="#">Needs of Countries in Special Situations (LDCs), land-locked developing countries (LLDCs), and small island developing States (SIDS) as well as specific challenges facing the middle-income countries;</a> Human rights, the right to development, global governance.
<b>OWG 7, 6-10 January 2014</b>	Sustainable cities and human settlements, sustainable transport; Sustainable consumption and production; Climate change and disaster risk reduction.
<b>OWG 8, 3-7 February 2014</b>	Oceans and seas, forests, biodiversity; Promoting equality, including social equity, gender equality and women’s empowerment; Conflict prevention, post-conflict peacebuilding and the promotion of durable peace, rule of law and governance.

## WHY SDGs AND HOW DO THEY RELATE TO THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs)?

Member States remain committed to the full and timely achievement of the MDGs, which expire in 2015. The MDGs provide a useful tool in focusing the development activities of the UN, for national priority-setting and for mobilization of stakeholders and resources towards common goals. In this context, defining SDGs should promote focused and coherent action on sustainable development with poverty eradication at its core. At the opening of the 68th session of the GA, Member States agreed to define one coherent post-2015 development agenda and set of goals. The work of the OWG will feed into the intergovernmental process to define these goals and their broader agenda, beginning in September 2014.

## WHEN WILL THE SDGs BE DEVELOPED AND DECIDED ON?

The OWG scheduled eight meetings between March 2013 and February 2014 to address a broad range of thematic issues (see table page 1). [An interim report](#) was submitted by the OWG to the opening of the 68th General Assembly. After its final four meetings conclude in February 2014, the OWG will draft a report containing recommendations on sustainable development goals and targets. This report will be completed by September 2014 and delivered to the UN General Assembly, where all Member States are represented; there, States will deliberate and take the final decision on the SDGs and on how they are integrated into the post-2015 development agenda.

## WHO ARE THE MEMBERS OF THE OWG?

The OWG was defined at Rio+20 as a 30-member group. The OWG uses an innovative system of 30 seats shared by 70 Member States, in regional groups (see Box 2). In its first session, the OWG elected the Permanent Representatives of Kenya and Hungary to the UN as the co-chairs to lead and moderate the sessions, guide the direction of the group, and work towards achieving consensus among its members. While the OWG has 30 members at any given time, the official meetings have so far been open to the participation of all Member States.

### Box 2

#### MEMBERS OF THE OWG ON SDGs:

##### African Group

Algeria / Egypt / Morocco / Tunisia  
Ghana / Benin / Kenya  
United Republic of Tanzania  
Congo / Zambia / Zimbabwe

##### Asia-Pacific Group

Nauru / Palau / Papua New Guinea  
Bhutan / Thailand / Viet Nam  
India / Pakistan / Sri Lanka  
China / Indonesia / Kazakhstan  
Cyprus / Singapore / United Arab Emirates  
Bangladesh / Republic of Korea  
Saudi Arabia / Iran (Islamic Republic of)  
Japan / Nepal

##### Latin American & Caribbean Group (GRULAC)

Colombia / Guatemala  
Bahamas / Barbados / Guyana  
Haiti / Trinidad and Tobago / Mexico  
Peru / Brazil / Nicaragua / Argentina  
Bolivia (Plurinational State of) / Ecuador

##### Western European and Others Group (WEOG):

Australia / Netherlands / United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland  
Canada / Israel / United States of America  
Denmark / Ireland / Norway  
France / Germany / Switzerland  
Italy / Spain / Turkey

##### Eastern European Group

Hungary / Belarus / Serbia  
Bulgaria / Croatia / Montenegro  
Slovenia / Poland / Romania

## HOW DO THE UN INSTITUTIONS SUPPORT THE OWG IN THE DESIGN OF THE SDGs?

An inter-agency [Technical Support Team](#), co-chaired by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and UN Development Programme (UNDP) provides support to the OWG in the form of issues briefs for each topic addressed by the OWG. These briefs are available on the [Sustainable Development Knowledge platform](#) (under UN System Inputs). For links to the issues briefs by theme, please see Box 1.

## HOW CAN CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATE IN THE OWG?

Civil society organizations in organizations that fall under one of the following categories have the opportunity to interact with the Open Working Group and provide their expertise, recommendations and demands on the various issues being discussed. These categories are: accreditation to the Commission for Sustainable Development, Rio+20, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), or a Prepcom; consultative status with ECOSOC.

### *Attend as observers and speak at the official meetings of the OWG:*

Civil society representatives with ECOSOC status can attend the OWG's official meetings as observers by accessing the UN premises using their annual UN groundspasses. By invitation of the co-chairs, civil society organizations will be able to speak to the OWG during the meetings; these interventions will be incorporated into the official chairs' summary of each session. Interventions in the OWG official meetings are coordinated through the Major Groups Organizing Partners.



For more information please contact the [Organizing Partners](#).

### Box 3

#### MAJOR GROUPS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Non-governmental participation in UN sustainable development processes has been formalized by UN Member States (governments) since the 1992 Earth Summit. It is structured through nine sectors of society or communities of interest known as the "Major Groups." These are: women; children and youth; indigenous peoples; non-governmental organizations; local authorities; workers and trade unions; business and industry; and scientific and technological community. More information on the Major Groups, including on how to join, is available [here](#). In addition to these nine Major Groups, the Rio+20 outcome document emphasizes that sustainable development requires the meaningful involvement and active participation of other stakeholders.

### *Participate in daily informal morning meetings with the co-chairs and members of the OWG:*

In addition to the interventions during the official meetings, the co-chairs of the OWG hold meetings with Major Groups and other stakeholder representatives from 9:00 to 10:00 AM each day of the OWG sessions. Each morning meeting is organized around specific themes of sustainable development that correspond to the OWG programme of work. The format of these meetings is structured around two brief presentations by civil society representatives to frame the topic, followed by interventions from the floor reacting to the information or supplementing it with different points of view. To facilitate the planning of these meetings, representatives from Major Groups and other stakeholders are encouraged to join ad hoc

planning groups, called steering committees, to coordinate each daily session. The work of the steering committees includes selecting two panellists to make brief presentations that frame the issues, and compiling a speakers' list for those who wish to follow up with 2-3 minute reactions or brief interventions.



To learn more about these steering committees and to register your interest in participating, please click [here](#).

### ***Attend and participate in two intersessional meetings with the OWG co-chairs:***

The OWG, through the co-chairs, have invited Major Groups and other stakeholders to two separate day-long interactive intersessional meetings at UN Headquarters in New York, the first on 22 November 2013 and the second to be held in early 2014 (date to be determined). The organization of these meetings will be supported by the Division for Sustainable Development at DESA. Civil society representatives can attend these intersessionals by pre-registering online via CSONet at <http://bit.ly/1aoQHh0>. Steering committees, like those set up for the OWG morning meetings, will help identify the panellists from Major Groups and other stakeholders representatives in these events.



More information on the intersessionals is available [here](#).

### ***Participate in and/or facilitate coordination workshops with civil society organizations working on sustainable development and post-2015 issues:***

Half-day workshops have been organized by representatives of the Major Groups and other stakeholders active in the post-2015 process, preceding or following each of the OWG meetings. These meetings enable civil society to share information, develop coordinated strategies around each OWG session, and formulate plans for joint outreach and lobbying. On a rotating basis, two representatives from Major Groups and other stakeholders will facilitate each meeting's agenda-setting process and run the workshop.



Civil society organizations interested in participating, suggesting agenda items, or facilitating one of the workshops are invited to contact the Major Group [Organizing Partners](#).

### ***Join a Thematic Cluster to post documents and submit nominations:***

Major Groups and other stakeholders now have the opportunity to self-organize in Thematic Clusters. Each of these clusters is coordinated by a [steering committee](#) responsible for actively engaging with Major Groups and other stakeholders in preparing joint position papers or briefs for consideration of the Open Working Group. Registration is available [here](#).



For more information on the Thematic Clusters, please see [this page](#).

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