

**EVALUATING THE SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT GOALS: New Challenges for  
Research, Policy and Business**

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**The SDGs: an unprecedented  
evaluation challenge**

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# The challenge is new

- The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were systematically monitored by the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank but they were **not** evaluated.
- By contrast the SDGs will be evaluated. According to the Summit Outcome document they will be informed by high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable *country-led evaluations and data*.
- The Outcome document also highlights the need for enhanced *evaluation capacity-building in developing countries*

# The process was legitimate ...

- The MDGs were concocted by a small group of men in the basement of UN headquarters
- The SDGs emerged from the largest consultation programme ever carried out by the UN
  - Panel of eminent persons
  - Intergovernmental working group
  - 11 thematic and 83 national consultations
  - door-to-door and online surveys
- Formal endorsement by the General Assembly in and approval by 193 heads of States

## ...but do the SDGs overreach?

- The SDGs embody universal human aspirations but are they too complex?
- The SDGs: 17 goals and 169 targets vs. 8 MDGs and 21 targets
- “A mess and a distraction so sprawling and misconceived that that they are bound to fail”? (The Economist)
- “A bureaucratic accounting exercise with scant impact on reality”? (Financial Times)
- “Is having 169 priorities like having no priorities at all”? (Bjorn Lomborg)

## **... or does the adverse reaction reflect an environmental insensitive stance?**

- MDGs: growth focus + a single environmental goal (#7) buttressed by two modest targets
- 4 environmental SDGs (responsible production and consumption, climate action, life below water and on land) and 38 targets
- Sustainability embedded in 3 other goals (energy, infrastructure and urbanization).

## **...and is it not time to address conflict and inequality..**

- The SDGs embrace the peace agenda: a third of the world's poor live in fragile areas today rising to half in 2018 and nearly two-thirds in 2030.
- The SDGs highlight the reduction of inequalities: by next year the top 1 percent will have more wealth than the remaining 99 percent of people

## ... as well as the responsibilities of the developed world?

- Only MDG #8 addressed rich countries and it was weak and lacked targets
- By contrast the SDGs include targets about aid flows, aid to the least developed countries, debt, technology transfer, trade liberalization, intellectual property, financial market regulation, LDCs' representation in multilateral institutions, etc.

# An exceptionally tough global evaluation challenge

- The SDGs are transformational, e.g. poverty eradication is a major formative evaluation challenge
- The SDGs will require massive evaluation capacity building: in 1990, 90 percent of the world's poor lived in low-income countries. Now 80 percent of the poor live in middle-income countries
- Aid still matters for the poorest countries but looking ahead other global policies matter even more and they will need to be evaluated

# **New evaluation approaches will be required**

- Formidable data constraints will have to be managed (with new information technologies)
- New methods needed: results chains and linear models are no longer adequate
- Priority to fragile, conflict ridden areas where evaluation capacities are weak
- Policy evaluation will have to be mastered beyond aid
- The market led and private sector evaluation gaps will have to be filled

# They will have to be theory based and focused on results

PEACE, JUSTICE AND  
INSTITUTIONS

GROWTH AND  
EMPLOYMENT

RESPONSIBLE  
PRODUCTION AND  
CONSUMPTION

CLIMATE ACTION

PARTNERSHIP

CLEAN WATER AND  
SANITATION

QUALITY EDUCATION

AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN  
ENERGY

INDUSTRY,  
INFRASTRUCTURE  
INOVATION

SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND  
COMMUNITIES

NO POVERTY

ZERO HUNGER

HEALTH AND WELL BEING

GENDER EQUALITY

REDUCED INEQUALITIES

SUSTAINABLE LIFE ON LAND

SUSTAINABLE LIFE UNDER  
WATER