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Institutional Section

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SIXTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

The post-2015 sustainable development agenda: Update

Purpose of the document

The Governing Body is informed about progress in formulating the post-2015 sustainable development framework and invited to recommend the tripartite constituents, and request the Director-General, to strengthen work under the six-point strategy for engagement agreed upon at its 319th Session (October 2013) (see the draft decision in paragraph 29).

Relevant strategic objective: All.

Policy implications: Yes.

Legal implications: No.

Financial implications: No.

Follow-up action required: Yes.

Author unit: Multilateral Cooperation Department (MULTILATERALS).

Related documents: GB.322/INS/4/1; GB.322/POL/1; GB.322/POL/2; GB.322/POL/3; GB.322/POL/6; GB.322/INS/INF/1.

I. Introduction

1. The proposal for a set of 17 sustainable development goals agreed upon in July 2014 at the final session of the Open Working Group (OWG) for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is setting the stage for the final round of negotiations that will start in January 2015 and, in September 2015, will lead the United Nations General Assembly to adopt its development agenda beyond 2015.
2. The OWG proposal is the result of an open and intense intergovernmental debate. It sets forth a comprehensive framework of ambitious goals and targets, providing a suitable blueprint for negotiating and approving the final document. ILO issues are prominent, particularly in the proposed sustainable development goal 8 to “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”. Several key items of the decent work agenda are encompassed as targets under this goal, while others are mentioned under other proposed goals. A target on implementing “nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors”, for instance, is suggested under goal 1, “end poverty in all its forms everywhere”.¹
3. The final negotiations will also be supported by a synthesis report prepared by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. It will bring together the outcomes of various post-2015 processes and reports in addition to the OWG proposal, particularly on financing and means of implementation from the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing and the results of the UN Development Group (UNDG) national dialogues on delivering the post-2015 agenda.
4. This paper reviews the outcomes of the post-2015 process thus far and the contribution of the ILO and its tripartite constituents and sets forward some suggestions for action to ensure a successful outcome for the ILO. It also calls attention to the need for the Office to begin equipping itself to deliver on the new agenda in order to take advantage of the forthcoming opportunities to promote decent work for all.

II. Outcomes of the post-2015 intergovernmental process

The Open Working Group for Sustainable Development Goals

5. After a long process encompassing 13 full sessions over 16 months, stock-taking discussions of 58 issues, presentations from over 80 experts and consultations with business associations, trade unions, NGOs and civil society, the OWG presented its outcome document in July 2014.² The proposal includes a list of 17 SDGs that are presented as action oriented, global in nature and universally applicable, while at the same time taking into account different national realities and priorities. According to the OWG, the goals constitute “an integrated, indivisible set of global priorities for sustainable development”. They are accompanied by 169 targets – 62 of which refer to means of

¹ See: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>.

² The 30-member intergovernmental OWG was created as a follow-up of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) (A/67/L.48/Rev.1 – January 2013).

implementation – defined as “aspirational global targets, with each government setting its own national targets guided by the global level of ambition but taking into account national circumstances”. Targets should be supported by indicators focused on measurable outcomes, to be elaborated at a later stage.

6. The introduction to the proposal underlines that poverty eradication remains “the greatest global challenge facing the world today and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development”. The Millennium Development Goal (MDG) legacy is clear in the proposed goals 1 to 7, calling for action on poverty, food security and nutrition, health, quality education, gender equality, water and sanitation, and access to energy. Inclusive and equitable economies and societies are also indispensable to sustainable development, with proposed goals 8 to 11 covering inclusive growth and decent work, infrastructure and industrialization, inequality, and cities, respectively. Environmental protection is the theme of goals 12 to 15, and goal 16 covers topics related to governance and peace. Finally, goal 17 calls for strengthened global partnerships on finance, technology, capacity building, trade, policy coherence, multi-stakeholder partnerships and data, monitoring and accountability.
7. Of 12 targets under goal 8, one explicitly calls for efforts to “by 2030 achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value”. Other relevant targets are to reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training; end child labour in all its forms and eradicate forced labour; protect labour rights and ensure safe working conditions for all workers including migrant workers; and encourage entrepreneurship, innovation and the formalization of micro-, small and medium enterprises. Concerning the means to achieve those objectives, specific reference is made to putting into operation a global strategy for youth employment by 2020 and implementing the ILO Global Jobs Pact.
8. Additional references to ILO areas of concern are found in several other SDG targets. The question of social protection is a core target for action under the poverty goal and is mentioned together with wage and fiscal policies as a means to address inequality. Technical and vocational skills are the topic of three targets under the education goal. Other references relate to rural workers, workers in the health and education sectors, unpaid care and domestic work, migrant workers, small and medium enterprises in value chains, resilience to climate-related hazards and economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters, discrimination, and fundamental freedoms.
9. The OWG proposal is the outcome of a complex negotiation process where sharp differences of opinion were expressed, particularly in the final stages preceding the agreement. Some criticized it for being too ambitious and broad to serve as a compelling list of global priorities requiring time-bound voluntary action.³ For others, the references to human rights are tenuous and do not provide a solid global framework for socially and ecologically sustainable development.⁴ Aside from specific concerns, however, the general reaction of civil society has been positive. In particular, most groups expressed

³ See <http://www.cgdev.org/blog/what%E2%80%99s-point-post-2015-agenda>.

⁴ See <http://www.4thworldmovement.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Response-to-Co-chairs-Final.pdf>.

appreciation for the open and inclusive manner in which the OWG fulfilled its mandate.⁵ This sets a precedent for future global intergovernmental negotiations.

10. The social partners were active contributors, submitting inputs and expressing their voice throughout the OWG process. Employers expressed appreciation for the recognition of the importance of the rule of law and good governance under goal 16 and for the emphasis on innovative partnerships with the private sector.⁶ Workers found the agreement ambitious and encouraging on the whole, although they regretted the lack of dedicated goals on decent work and social protection and of references to international labour standards and the issues of wages and green jobs.⁷
11. The list of goals and targets proposed by the OWG could still be modified or streamlined in the final round of negotiations. Some countries voiced the need to preserve their integrity; others expressed their reservation on certain topics.⁸ However, the majority of the proposals are grounded on solid consensus. In particular those addressing employment, decent work and social protection were deemed to be global priorities and core elements of a transformative agenda. Unlike the MDGs, the world of work and its actors – employers, workers and governments – are viewed as key engines of development, central to any future framework.

The Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing (ICESDF)

12. The ICESDF was also established as a follow-up to Rio+20. Composed of 30 experts, it held a series of closed sessions with a few briefings and consultations with stakeholders and international agencies. The outcome report proposes a strategic approach and options to mobilize and effectively use resources to achieve the objective of sustainable development, encompassing funds that are both domestic and international, and public and private. It calls for domestic resource mobilization and the use of tax and fiscal policies, productive and decent employment and social protection floors to address inequity, fight poverty and build resilience.⁹

⁵ For a preliminary analysis of civil society's reactions see: <http://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/node/451197>; <http://post2015.iisd.org/news/civil-society-reacts-to-proposed-sdgs/>.

⁶ Statement made by the Global Business Alliance for Post-2015: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10908business.pdf>.

⁷ See ITUC reflections at: <http://www.solidar-suisse.org/2014/08/13/reactions-on-the-releasd-owg-sdg-paper/>.

⁸ A consensus was only narrowly reached on the following issues: e.g., governance, sexual and reproductive rights, climate change, sustainable patterns of consumption and production, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, and the question of means of implementation.

⁹ See <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/4588FINAL%20REPORT%20ICESDF.pdf>.

UNDG national dialogues on “delivering the post-2015 development agenda”

13. Building on the success of the global consultation that inaugurated the post-2015 process,¹⁰ the UNDG launched in March 2014 a series of dialogues on the factors within each country that may support or impede implementation of the new agenda. The dialogues are organized along six thematic groups: strengthening capacities and building effective institutions; localizing the agenda; participatory monitoring and accountability; partnerships with civil society; engaging with the private sector; and culture and development. Under each theme, multi-stakeholder discussions are held in a group of five to ten countries from all regions.
14. The national dialogues are intended to complement the global discussion on broader means of implementation, such as the availability of financing and technologies and a conducive global policy environment. The preliminary results point to the importance of strengthening national administrative capacities as well as mechanisms for participation, inclusion and partnership with the private sector, unions, civil society and other local stakeholders. This approach is a fundamental aspect of the ILO’s practice of social dialogue.

III. The ILO’s contribution

15. The ILO has made a distinctive contribution to the work on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda in line with the six-point strategy adopted at the 319th Session of the Governing Body (October 2013).
16. In order to contribute to accelerating the progress made towards achieving the MDGs, the Office supported progress on MDG 5 (improve maternal health) and MDG 6 (combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases) in Ghana. Under MDG 1 (eradicate extreme poverty and hunger), the ILO helped establish a National Forum on Social Protection in Niger, improve income and productive employment opportunities for small-scale farmers in the United Republic of Tanzania, and design youth employment plans and enhance women’s participation in political institutions and the labour market in Colombia. International labour standards, tripartism and social dialogue underpinned the ILO’s contribution.
17. Through its participation in the UN Technical Support Team, the Office has been providing technical input to the co-chairs of the OWG throughout the process, co-leading interagency support to the discussion on poverty, growth, employment and decent work goals. At the request of OWG members, the Office intervened at various sessions to clarify technical questions concerning full employment, child labour, youth employment, social protection or other topics of pertinence to the ILO. High-level meetings, informal briefings and technical discussions have also been organized with representatives of UN member States in New York and Geneva, in some cases with the participation of the Director-General of the ILO.
18. The Office has also been active in the UN System Task Team on the post-2015 development agenda, hosting the retreat held in Geneva on 15 September 2014. The Task Team – made up of senior representatives from 50 agencies including the International

¹⁰ See:

<http://www.worldwewant2015.org/bitcache/cb02253d47a0f7d4318f41a4d11c330229991089?vid=422422&disposition=inline&op=view>.

Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization – is a main contributor to the preparation of the synthesis report the UN General Assembly requested that the Secretary-General of the United Nations prepare by the end of 2014. Retreat participants looked in particular at the areas where the UN system was best placed to focus and deliver.

19. In cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme and under the auspices of Germany and the Republic of Moldova, the Office also took the lead in organizing the post-2015 dialogue on strengthening capacities and building effective institutions. National multi-stakeholder consultations were held in Costa Rica, Djibouti, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Republic of Moldova, Pakistan, Rwanda, Togo, and Turkmenistan. A global expert meeting was held in Bonn from 29 to 30 September 2014 and a final event is scheduled to take place in the Republic of Moldova in February 2015. The preliminary results suggest the importance of aligning the new agenda to national development strategies, reinforcing capacities for policy coherence and ensuring genuine participation of stakeholders in the design, implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. Work was supported by an advisory group of experts including representatives from the International Organisation of Employers and the International Trade Union Confederation.
20. ILO field offices, such as those in Rome and Lisbon, were at times involved in defining a country's national position on post-2015. On several occasions, they assisted the social partners in consultations at country and regional levels, for example in Albania, Costa Rica, Colombia, Malaysia, Mauritius, Republic of Moldova and Togo. Support and technical inputs were provided at the Presidential Summit on MDGs and post-2015 (Abuja, Nigeria); the regional post-2015 conference (Istanbul, Turkey); the XII Meeting of the Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (Maputo, Mozambique); and at the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (Pattaya, Thailand). At the UN Conference on Small Island Developing States held in September 2014, the ILO highlighted the importance of inclusive growth, decent work, social protection, and labour standards in the development agenda of those countries.
21. At the global level, the Trade Union Strategy Workshop on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, organized by the ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities in June 2014, brought together union leaders from all regions to develop proposals for submission to the OWG. The tripartite seminar, "Employment and decent work for all – The best route out of poverty", organized in Rome in April 2014 by the departments of Partnerships and Field Support and Multilateral Cooperation in collaboration with the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, called for setting decent work for all as one of the future goals. The implications of the post-2015 framework were also discussed at the 103rd Session (2014) of the International Labour Conference in the recurrent discussion on the strategic objective of employment and reflected in its conclusions.¹¹
22. At the technical level, the findings of the *World of Work Report 2014* provided useful evidence for advocacy on the significance of quality jobs for inclusive and sustainable growth. Contributions to post-2015 debates were made on a range of technical issues including cooperatives, HIV/AIDS, gender, education and skills, full employment, youth employment, the informal economy, child labour and labour market indicators. As co-chair of the Social Protection Inter-agency Cooperation Board, the Office provided substantive insight into the discussion of social protection floors. As chair of the Global Migration Group, the Office gave its views concerning the OWG and the high-level United Nations General Assembly side event on post-2015 and migration organized by Turkey.

¹¹ GB.322/INS/4/1.

IV. Main issues and next steps

23. As the final phase of the post-2015 process is approaching, it will be important to further the strategy of engagement recommended by the Governing Body at its October 2013 session.
24. Advocacy by constituents and the Office about the significance of full employment and decent work, including social protection, will remain a core influencing factor on the final negotiations, by means of tripartite action at the national level in order to influence official country positions as well as through interaction with delegations to the United Nations in New York. Launched in September 2014, the Group of Friends of Decent Work for Sustainable Development, chaired by the delegations of Angola and Belgium, will provide a useful platform for informal policy discussions and exchange.
25. Should the OWG practice be maintained, the mechanism for consultation and participation from the major groups and other stakeholders would provide a convenient channel for the social partners to convey their distinctive inputs as well as a vehicle for the Office to reach out to local governments, academic networks, NGOs and other stakeholders who share ILO concerns.
26. Once the final round officially starts in January 2015, technical support will be requested by the negotiating delegations concerning the appropriate formulation of targets, indicators and means of implementation. The inputs of the ILO should be timely and informed by its vast knowledge base as well its distinctive policy and normative instruments.
27. An active role should be maintained in the UN system-wide post-2015 initiatives at national, regional and global levels. Contributions to the preparation of the Secretary-General's synthesis report should aim at ensuring that the level of ambition of the new agenda is delivered on the ground in terms of focused and concrete initiatives in ILO areas. Attention should be paid to the outcomes of the Independent Expert Advisory Group on the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development. It will also be important to contribute to the internal discussion, which has just begun, on how to make the UN system fit for purpose to deliver the new agenda.
28. Getting fit for purpose for post-2015 is especially relevant to the ILO. Increased attention to inclusive growth, full employment and decent work, including social protection, will undoubtedly be part of the future framework. It will open up a host of opportunities to promote ILO fundamental Conventions and strategic objectives. At the same time it will require additional capacities and resources to scale up ILO activities and respond to new requests for setting baselines for new national sustainable development strategies, identifying new sources of resource mobilization, defining joint operating procedures and policy coherence across agencies, assisting in the implementation of policies and programmes to achieve the new goals, providing capacity building in ILO areas to national and international partners and social partners, accounting for timely and reliable national and global monitoring of progress, and supporting the effective participation of tripartite constituents.

Draft decision**29. The Governing Body:**

- (a) recommends the tripartite constituents, and requests the Director-General, to strengthen work on the post-2015 sustainable development framework under the six-point strategy agreed upon at the 319th Session (October 2013) of the Governing Body; and*
- (b) requests to review progress on this matter regularly.*