



Food security in the Sustainable Development Goals: Where is the process heading?

Next year is the deadline for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Despite great progress in some areas, major challenges remain.¹ At the Rio+20 conference, world leaders agreed to draft a new set of goals for post-2015 development, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).² This brief examines how the SDGs process to date has addressed issues related to food security, sustainable agriculture and nutrition, and identifies areas where SIANI's contributions would be most valuable.

The SDGs have a broader scope than the MDGs and take a different approach.³ While the MDGs applied only to poor countries, the SDGs aim to be *universally applicable*; the goals will be relevant to all countries, and all will be expected to contribute to the goals' achievement. While the MDGs addressed key issues individually, the SDGs are meant to take a more *integrated* approach to social, economic and environmental issues, to ensure sustainability. The SDGs are also meant to set "*transformative*" targets that address the root causes of poverty and systemic barriers to sustainable development.

An emerging agenda for food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture

The MDGs addressed food security in Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, and covered other issues relevant to agriculture and rural development in Goals 7 and 8, on environmental sustainability and a global partnership for development. However, it did not specifically address agriculture.

The SDGs are being drafted through a process led by the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG), which has been tasked with developing a proposal for the UN Secretary General. In parallel, stakeholder consultations at the global and national levels, and numerous workshops, statements, and reports by UN and non-governmental organizations, think tanks and academics are also helping shape the agenda. The OWG's third meeting, in May 2013, included in-depth discussions on food security and nutrition and on sustainable agriculture, and several more SDG inputs since have focused on those issues.⁴

General consensus has emerged on the objectives of an SDG for sustainable agriculture and food security: increasing productivity while ensuring efficient use of resources. There is also broad support for an equity agenda

that prioritizes vulnerable populations and vulnerable food and farming systems. While the MDGs' hunger eradication goal focused on caloric intake, the SDGs process has emphasized the nutritional value of food as well. Inputs address undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, obesity and overweight and emphasize the importance of good nutrition in the first 1000 days of a child's life. The Secretary General's "Zero Hunger Challenge" has been a source of inspiration.⁵ Other widely cited principles include "the right to food", "right to be free from hunger", "right to adequate food", and a "land degradation-neutral world".

Consistent with the SDGs' more integrated approach, key inputs to the process have highlighted *linkages* between food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture, and with a wide range of issues covered in other proposed goals: inclusive economic growth, job creation, population dynamics, employment, social protection, energy, water, health, sanitation, natural resources management, ecosystems protection and resilience. The *sustainability* of food systems features prominently in several SDG inputs, as does the need to integrate the sustainable use of resources (water, land, forests) in efforts to intensify agriculture. Another recurring theme is the need to improve agricultural value chains and reduce food waste at all stages – including post-harvest and storage losses as well as at the consumption end.

Consistent with the aim to formulate universal and transformative goals, several contributions to the SDGs debate have focused on the *underlying causes* of food insecurity, highlighting gender inequality, social exclusion, and unequal access to opportunities. Much attention is being given to smallholders and small-scale farming systems, which are seen as both vulnerable, and as key agents of change. The need to build smallholders' resilience has been emphasized, as well as the need for their involvement in decision-making, control over inputs (including land), access to markets, and capacity-building. Discussions have also focused on international policies that affect food prices, trade, food safety and investment in the agricultural sector, with calls for making these more supportive of the least developed countries and their products. Private-sector engagement, for example in agribusiness, has also been highlighted, along with businesses' social and environmental responsibilities. More generally, government ownership and accountability for the development agenda has been cited as crucial to progress, and multi-stakeholder forums have been identified as a preferred form of engagement and coordination.

¹ United Nations (2013a) ² United Nations (2012) ³ For more information on criteria and principles guiding the selection of goals and targets, see e.g. Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform "[Sustainable Development Goals](#)"; IRF2015 "[The OWG11 'Focus Areas' Paper: An IRF2015 Review](#)", and "[Goals, Targets and Indicators](#)"; Stockholm Environment Institute "[Cross-Sectoral Integration in the Sustainable Development Goals: a Nexus Approach](#)". ⁴ See long version of this brief for list of documents reviewed for this text at <http://www.siani.se/resources/report/food-security-SDG>. ⁵ The UN Secretary's "Zero Hunger Challenge" goals are: i) zero stunted children under 2; ii) 100% access to adequate food all year around iii) all food systems are sustainable; iv) a 100% increase in smallholder productivity and income; v) zero loss or waste of food.

SDG proposals on food security and sustainable agriculture

With a few weeks remaining to finalize its report, the Open Working Group is considering several goals and targets relevant to sustainable food security and sustainable agriculture. The Zero draft (June 2) includes eight targets under Goal 2 "End hunger, achieve food security and adequate nutrition for all, and promote sustainable agriculture." There are some overlaps in the proposed targets and suggestions were made at the 12th session of the OWG (June 16-20) to merge or move some of them.⁶ Within the framework, other goals that address food insecurity focus on gender equality, health, reducing inequality, promoting sustainable consumption and production, addressing climate change, protecting terrestrial ecosystems and halting biodiversity loss, and strengthening global partnership for sustainable development.⁷

The issues prioritized by the Open Working Group also feature prominently in other SDG frameworks, sector goals and targets proposed by various entities. In general, the proposals reflect a desire to complete the MDGs' unfinished business but also go further. Increased agricultural productivity is closely linked with sustainable and efficient resource use and efforts to reduce land degradation and protect biodiversity. Social policies and resource access and affordability are also improved, ensuring that agriculture provides decent work and safe incomes. Smallholders, women and other vulnerable groups are empowered, and investments in agriculture are targeted at smallholders in particular. Global trade is also made more development-friendly. The tables below summarize the various proposed targets related to food security across different goals.

What's missing?

The many aspects of food security – interlinked through production and consumption chains, natural resource use, and interactions between countries – call for a holistic and integrated approach. The SDGs process so far has taken a more integrated approach than the MDGs did, but not enough. While the connections between goals are generally recognized, it is less clear how the SDG framework can address them to minimize contradictions and enhance synergies in the pursuit of different goals. The strong linkages between food security to other goal areas need to be addressed for the SDG framework to be sustainable.

Further, although there is largely consensus about the food security goals, the strategies to achieve them have yet to be developed. Individual inputs have made suggestions for climate-smart agriculture, conservation

⁶ For more detail, see e.g. [Earth Negotiations Bulletin](#) ⁷ For a review of goals addressing food security see table in full version, or OWG (2014) "Introduction and Proposed Goals and Targets on Sustainable Development for the Post 2015 Development Agenda", 2 June 2014.

agriculture, agroforestry, biotechnology and agro-ecology, but the proposals mostly speak in broad terms about technical, policy and investment conditions for achieving sustainable agriculture. The proposals are also weak on issues such as research and technology transfer, although investments in access to affordable and environmentally sound technologies will be crucial to enabling the desired systemic shifts in current agriculture and food systems. As several inputs have stressed, farmers need stronger scientific support along with their traditional knowledge. SIANI's mission to promote dialogue on food security and nutrition is deeply relevant here.

Where next?

The Open Working Group is delivering its final report to the Secretary General prior to the 69th Session of the UN General Assembly, in September 2014. The OWG report will serve as the basis for the intergovernmental negotiations that will be launched in September. It will also feed into the Secretary General's Synthesis Report, which is expected towards the end of 2014 and will summarize the SDG process and inputs to date. The negotiations are to continue until a summit in September 2015, where a final SDGs decision is expected.

There is general agreement among governments that the SDGs should include a goal on food security and agriculture, but agreeing on some aspects of the goal may still prove challenging. While targets focusing on food access enjoy broad support, sustainability and equity-oriented targets are politically more difficult. Production of biofuels, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), trade-distorting subsidies and "land-grabbing" are also contested areas.

Beyond goals and targets, negotiations must still address indicators, the means of implementation, monitoring and, not least, financing. Thus, the OWG's proposal is by no means the final product. There is clear scope for SIANI's experience in brokering knowledge between sectors, stimulating research ideas, sharing on-the-ground experience and linking it to policy and global processes, to support the continued development of Sustainable Development Goals as countries move to formulate national targets and strategies for implementation.

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A full version of this brief in English is available at:
<http://www.siani.se/resources/report/food-security-SDG>

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