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1. (April 2015)

Introduction: the Sustainable Development Goals Forum

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Abstract: This introduction notes the contributions of various authors to the first issue of the *Journal of Global Ethics 2015 Forum* and briefly explains the United Nations process through which the Sustainable Development Goals have been formulated up to the receipt by the General Assembly, in August 2014, of the *Report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals* (UN A/68/970). The goals are identified as a confluence of distinct streams of UN work attended to variously by policy experts and political figures in the past several decades. Sources include, most obviously, the Millennium Declaration of 2000 and the Millennium Development Goals, but also the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the Human Development Reports of 1990 forward, and the 1987 Brundtland Report.

Keywords: Millennium Development Goals, Sustainable Development Goals, Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals, High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, Human Development Index

On August 12th 2014 the United Nations General Assembly received the *Report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals* (UN A/68/970).¹ The Open Working Group (OWG) was created through an endorsement by the General Assembly of the outcome document of the “Rio + 20” United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development of June 2012 (resolution

¹ See http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/68/970.

66/288, July 2012).² The Rio + 20 outcome document was simply and sweetly entitled “*The Future We Want*”, and its endorsement led the UN to pursue an especially broad “open” process of consultation over the following two years, “to establish an inclusive and transparent intergovernmental process on sustainable development goals that is open to all stakeholders, with a view to developing global sustainable development goals to be agreed by the General Assembly.” (res. 66/288 §248) Evidence of the work of consultation by the OWG, which is now complete, has been provided on a dedicated website that will provide further information as it develops, at the “Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform,” <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org>. It is anticipated that the General Assembly will accept a final version of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with specific targets pertaining to the goals, in September 2015.³ The goals and targets will bear a close resemblance to those found in the Open Working Group report.

The reflections presented in this year’s *Journal of Global Ethics Forum* are penned practically at the endpoint of the consultation process and formulation of the SDGs, and before their political fine-tuning,⁴ their funding,⁵ and the determination of

² The conference is often called “Rio +20” in reference to the 20th anniversary of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, in Rio de Janeiro, and the 10th anniversary of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.

³ The OWG was constituted in January 2013 (see Draft Decision A/67/L.48/Rev.1). Further planning for the post-2015 development agenda may be found in a Draft Resolution of October 2013 (Draft Decision A/68/L.4). In September 2014, the General Assembly acknowledged “the conclusion of the work of the OWG,” and “Decide[d] that the proposal shall be the basis for integrating sustainable development goals into the post-2015 development agenda, while recognizing fully that other inputs may also be considered in this intergovernmental negotiation process at the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly.” (A/68/L.61)

⁴ At the 19 July 2014 OWG meeting a variety of reservations were expressed by nations: A/68/970, § III paragraph 13 notes, but does not detail these. A glimpse into the political process may be gained from the record of reservations and other observations by state

the measurement indicators that pertain to the seventeen goals and 169 targets that have been offered in the *OWG Report*. A political face for the new agenda has already been sketched in the May 2013 outcome report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, chaired by the leaders of Indonesia, Liberia, and Great Britain. In *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty And Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development*, the twenty-seven panelists propound the following ideals and plans:

Bold commitments in these five areas – leave no one behind, put sustainable development at the core, transform economies, build peace and effective and accountable institutions, and forge a new global partnership – would allow the international community to keep the promises made under the MDGs, raise the bar where experience shows we can do more, and add key issues that are missing. Together, these would be significant steps towards poverty eradication as an essential part of sustainable development.

... We believe that the combination of goals, targets, and indicators under the MDGs was a powerful instrument for mobilising resources and motivating action. For this reason, we recommend that the post-2015 agenda should also feature a limited number of high-priority goals and targets, with a clear time horizon and supported by measurable indicators. With this in mind, the Panel recommends that targets in the post-2015 agenda should be set for 2030.⁶

and other parties (1387 in total) leading up to that meeting. See “Statements by Topic: Sustainable development goals,”

<http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1573>.

⁵ Regarding the developing discussion of financing, see *Report of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing* (15 August 2014, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/315&Lang=E) and see subsequent documents at <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/intergovernmental/financecommittee>. Also relevant to finance is the work of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Financing for Development Office: <http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/>. The Third International Conference on Financing for Development, Addis Ababa, July 2015 will be the last major event before adoption of the Goals, anticipated for September.

⁶ *A New Global Partnership*, 13. Available at http://www.un.org/sg/management/pdf/HLP_P2015_Report.pdf. A list of “national

As *A New Global Partnership* attests, the SDGs have come to be formulated as the explicit successor to an earlier initiative, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which, variously, will have been achieved or will have expired at the close of 2015.

One philosophical concern in this “post-2015” agenda is the hegemony of goals and the quantitative focus involved in framing and achieving those goals within a new 15-year round, as is suggested in the above passage. Measurement of development is nothing new, and is not in itself troublesome. A familiar measure to reflect goals in development thinking – gross domestic product – came to be replaced in the 1990’s, for some international development agendas, with a multidimensional index that was more comprehensive, that used weighted factors, and that has occasionally been subject to revision (in 2010) as well: the Human Development Index. That index, backed by the *Human Development Reports* of 1990 forward, appears to have provided significant background for UN development thinking and for the framing and creation of the ambitious groups of targets encapsulated in the MDGs.

But an indicator, an index, or even a mathematical array of benchmarks to be approached and eventually to be met over a span of time, does not present the *telos* of a goal: as Aristotle suggested, “that for which a thing is done.” Behind the measurement lies its purpose, and the measure itself may present only a wisp, or even a phantom, of the intention that originally infused the creation of the goal. Such hollowing-out of the MDGs has been examined by many of the authors to be found in this forum. It is particularly familiar to philosophers in Thomas Pogge’s developing critique of the manipulation of the MDGs as they have been presented over the course of their formulation and the period of their application.⁷ The MDGs have also been examined by

targets,” with the exact targets not presented, is to be found pp. 30ff. See also “One Year On: An open letter from former members of the UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Agenda,” dated 22 September 2014, available at http://www.who.int/pmnch/media/news/2014/open_letter/en.

⁷ See especially “The first UN Millennium Development Goal: A cause for celebration?” in Thomas Pogge, *Politics as usual: what lies behind the pro-poor rhetoric*. (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 57-73.

many critics recently in a special issue of *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*. The editors of that issue, casting their own concerns about the Goals in the language of the social sciences, suggest a similar worry about the gap between the *telos* and the social scientific, political, and bureaucratic constructions that are the MDGs:

Targets and indicators need to be evaluated for their potential to give information on core human rights and human development priorities in dimensions of equity, participation, transparency and accountability. Reflexively privileging data availability may unwittingly neglect dimensions such as distributive consequences, and volatility of outcomes.⁸

In this issue of *Journal of Global Ethics*, Sakiko Fukuda-Parr – one of the authors of the above observation – joins with co-author Desmond McNeill to extend the retrospective assessment of the MDGs to the future SDGs. In “Post 2015: A New Era of Accountability?” the authors argue that “The ‘aid and exhortation’ model of global governance needs to be replaced by one based on a notion of ‘global justice’.” Their focus is upon allowing for responsibility and action in a fashion that takes account of the moral, practical, and particularist limitations that may arise in individualistic ethical frameworks. Drawing especially from Iris Marion Young and Michael Green, they promote a “social connection model of responsibility.” Ethical responsibility, they argue, lies with individuals involved in global institutional structures; and political responsibility is played out through the transformation of institutional actors that have promoted structural injustice on behalf of those who are responsible and have benefited from it.

Luis Camacho also looks back at the MDGs as he looks forward to the SDGs. His focus in *Sustainable Development Goals: kinds, connections and expectations* rests upon the weaknesses that attend advancing this pursuit of goals and targets for a second time. Shortfalls in addressing the MDGs suggest a track record in which deeds do not follow words, perhaps setting the stage for a similar performance. Camacho is also concerned with the effort to marry the previously instituted ideals for development with

⁸ Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, Alicia Ely Yamin and Joshua Greenstein, “The power of numbers: A critical review of MDG targets for human development and human rights.” *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* (15:2-3, May-August 2014), 105-117.

the newer focus upon sustainability: a marriage, he suggests, that is “not without its conflicts”: for example, in the use of the expression “sustainable industrialization,” which would appear to imply non-sustainable resource extraction. “Although some objections may be made to the very idea of combining development with sustainability,” Camacho writes, “the fact remains that stating the conditions for a better future is a much needed first step and a call for long-term planning, without which problems like climate change cannot be solved.” Shashi Motilal, in *Sustainable Development Goals and human obligations*, provides an interesting reflection upon that “first step,” writing of the manner in which the globally countenanced goals gain their normative force, themselves generating “a global moral order.” Motilal’s reflection on such a coalescing global ethic also includes expansion of the subject of the ethical: he suggests that “the concept of human moral obligations can be derived from the concept of dharma,” offering a sense of order that also extends beyond obligation to other humans alone. He writes that such “trans-boundary obligation” to other beings is “constitutive of human nature” as human nature is conceived within a concept of universal order in Classical Indian philosophy. Through Motilal’s pen, this offers a rich approach to envisioning human obligation as constituted within an ideal of global sustainability.

These authors and others in the forum lead us to consider the need for appropriate, richer characterizations of sustainability. That need is apparent in light of Camacho’s observation that something called “sustainability” is to be married, from 2015 forward, to a development project already in progress: one incorporating economics and practices that may not coordinate simply with a simple ideal of sustainability. Greatly varied conceptions of sustainability can be found in prominent UN documents that have guided policy.⁹ For example, since the 2005 World Summit

⁹ For a clear accounting of the development of the idea of sustainability in recent UN and governmental discourse, see the background paper for the High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability authored by John Drexhage and Debora Murphy, “Sustainable Development: From Brundtland to Rio 2012” (Sept. 2010, available at

meeting – a follow-up to the Millennium Summit of 2000, at which the Millennium Declaration was adopted – the rhetoric of “three pillars” of sustainable development has come to be found in some UN treatments.¹⁰ The three pillars – economic development, social development (sometimes also cast as “social equity”) and environmental protection – present a conception with breadth, but with an ideal of “environmental protection” that hardly displays the flexibility sought in the vision to “transform economies” of *A New Global Partnership*. An ideal of “ecological integrity” is a bit more developed and flexible as it is expressed in the Earth Charter of 2000, a non-governmental effort to characterize “values and principles to foster a sustainable future” endorsed or supported by various parties including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).¹¹ The beginnings of a nuanced characterization of sustainability may be found in the phrase “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” This phrase opens the second chapter of the 1987 report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*; also known as the Brundtland Report, after its chair, former Prime Minister of Norway Gro Harlem Brundtland. The Commission, formed by the United Nations in 1983, dissolved upon presentation of its report, much like the Open Working Group. Its work was further developed into an agenda for revising economic development with an eye to the environment in the *Agenda 21* action plan, developed at the UN Conference on Environment and Development, the original Rio Earth Summit of 1992. *Agenda 21*

http://www.un.org/wcm/webdav/site/climatechange/shared/gsp/docs/GSP1-6_Background%20on%20Sustainable%20Devt.pdf).

¹⁰ United Nations General Assembly, *2005 World Summit Outcome*, A/60/1, adopted by the General Assembly 16 September 2005. <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/487/60/PDF/N0548760.pdf>. See paragraphs 48 forward, and c.f. Drexenhage & Murphy for the alternative language.

¹¹ Earth Charter International, “Read the Charter”, section II. <http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/pages/Read-the-Charter.html>. For UNESCO activity, see <http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/pages/UNESCO%20Chair%20Project>.

and international agreements brokered at the 1992 conference – the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity – are the backdrop to Rio + 20, and greatly informed the ‘sustainable’ aspect of the SDGs.

Two further articles in the forum elaborate ideals of sustainability in the contexts of environmental impact and human development. Clara Brandi indicates the value of articulating a governing “earth system SDG,” using indicators of the earth’s “safe operating space” for continued support of life. Brandi draws upon the work of various researchers and of the German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU), which articulates six “planetary guard rails.” She argues that the SDGs, by contrast, promote a narrower perspective on sustainability, roughly corresponding to only two of the WBGU guardrails (see especially SDG Goals 12-15). Brandi’s suggestion, by contrast, links sustainable development to the cessation of specific environmentally degrading practices: she takes a systems approach to prevention for “an adequate framework to safeguard the Earth System,” rather than an approach that sets targets and indicators.

Francesca Pongiglione focuses on planning for sustainability in *The need for a priority structure for the Sustainable Development Goals*. Pongiglione notes that some ends are realizable largely through the realization of other ends, and this suggests a structure of priority. Agricultural sustainability is an example of such a candidate for an instrumentally and intrinsically valuable end, and Pongiglione makes the case for the instrumental value of education in particular, as it serves for reduction of vulnerability, particularly of women and for their dependent children, and reduction of population growth, which Pongiglione finds “surprisingly absent” from the SDG discussion, “despite more than two-thirds of developing countries’ governments formally expressing their concern on the matter.” She also argues that the shift of populations towards urban centres, redoubled by growth, produces a particularly rapid shift further towards unsustainability in resource use.

Merata Kawharu considers the vulnerabilities of the Māori, and she suggests their status is indicative of the conditions for many indigenous peoples in high-income countries. Kawharu indicates general unequal conditions of income, of hardship and of

health that redound disproportionately upon the lives of children. These vulnerabilities are tied particularly to the dissolution of culture that has resulted as people have traveled from their family meeting grounds, or marae, in search of employment. Migration for employment uproots us, detaching us from homes and homelands, causing particularly acute dislocation and alienation when employment and the partial support that it provides dries up. It is fitting that one Māori model of human well being, whare tapa whā, presents the mnemonic device of the four walls of a house to represent spiritual, mental, physical, and family & social aspects of wellness, and is often depicted in the form of the meeting house (wharenuī) that is to be found on the marae.¹²

In an article that brings further light to Māori and other indigenous conceptions of development and their contrast with the project of the SDGs, Krushil Watene and Mandy Yap note that “culture is absent from the broad aims of sustainable development and the sustainable development goals,” and is taken to be “useful merely as a means to achieving sustainable development in its economic, social, and environmental dimensions.” Echoing concerns about the framing of goals, participation and empowerment expressed by Fukuda-Parr and McNeill, Watene and Yap find that “The dominant paradigm of goal setting, data collection and measurement – in its universal applicability – lets indigenous contributions fall out of the discussion.” They argue that “Indigenous groups and other stakeholders have provided insights into how culture could be included and measured,” suggesting the importance of “culturally-appropriate services, collective rights to land, and food sovereignty.”

Several authors in the forum have noted that these new goals continue a pattern of aspirational statement adopted by the UN. *The Sustainable Development Goals: a plan for building a better world?* by Thomas Pogge and Mitu Sengupta notes further that an effective plan would promote goals with the binding force of treaty obligation and

¹² For information on various Māori conceptions of well being, including the development of this particular model at meetings in 1982, see Mason Durie, *Whaiora: Mental Health Development* (Oxford, 1994), 67-82.

would assign specific roles for responsibility in their implementation. The authors warn of the revision of goals “with hindsight” as has arisen with the MDGs, and they call for independent monitoring of the achievement of goals. They bring the measurement and reduction of inequality, both within countries and between countries, to the fore. In support of the “global partnership for sustainable development” that the Open Working Group endorses, as well as the High-Level Panel’s goal to “eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development,” other theorists of justice may sensibly endorse a formula offered by Sengupta and Pogge: rather than applauding the improvement of past conditions of underdevelopment and inequality, “The world’s governments should compare the world as it is with the world as they are required to shape it: a world so structured that human rights can be fully realized in it.”

The broad and programmatic account of the shortcomings of the UN approach that Pogge and Sengupta provide should present an effective springboard for further thought on justice and the SDGs. More thought is welcome: this *Journal of Global Ethics Forum* remains open for further submissions on this topic until mid-July. Journal readers are welcome to contribute, and pages will be made available to them as space permits. The call for reflections follows this introduction.

2. (December 2015)

INTRODUCTION: The 2030 Agenda

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Abstract: This introduction notes the contributions of authors to the second (final) issue of the *Journal of Global Ethics 2015 Sustainable Development Goals Forum*. It briefly explains the process through which the Sustainable Development Goals have developed from their receipt in 2014 to their passage in September 2015 by the UN General Assembly, and it considers their development in prospect. The Millennium Development Goals, which spanned 1990-2015, present a case study that reveals the changeability of such long-term multilateral commitments. They were enmeshed in overlapping and inconsistent national and intergovernmental commitments reaching from 1995 to 2005, and the text of those goals also evolved, stabilizing for the last time in 2007. The Sustainable Development Goals and attendant commitments should be expected to evolve similarly over their fifteen year run. This presents a concern, for among the three committees established by the UN to create the goals, the two committees charged with public consultation were retired as planned in 2014. The process evident thereafter has displayed a shift towards a strategy of enrolling broad public endorsement that leaves such consultation and specific responsibility to those consulted in doubt. This bodes ill for public deliberation on the goals and for public accountability as the agenda proceeds towards 2030.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, Millennium Development Goals, High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals

On the morning of September 25th at the fourth plenary meeting of the seventieth session of the United Nations General Assembly, nations adopted resolution A/RES/70/1, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.¹³ Paragraph 3 of *The 2030 Agenda* provides the most succinct statement of the gathering's cosmopolitan ambitions:

We resolve, between now and 2030, to end poverty and hunger everywhere; to combat inequalities within and among countries; to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies; to protect human rights and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources. We resolve also to create conditions for sustainable, inclusive and sustained economic growth, shared prosperity and decent work for all, taking into account different levels of national development and capacities.

¹³ <http://papersmart.unmeetings.org/ga/70th-session/plenary-meetings/programme/>.

Seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will replace the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the previous fifteen-year development round in a 'revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development' to take effect January 2016.

Table 1: Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals.

Millennium Development Goals: (2000-2015 (measurements dated 1990-2015))

- Goal 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Goal 2. Achieve universal primary education
- Goal 3. Promote gender equality and empower women
- Goal 4. Reduce child mortality
- Goal 5. Improve maternal health
- Goal 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Goal 7. Ensure environmental sustainability
- Goal 8. Develop a global partnership for development

Sustainable Development Goals: (2016-2030)

- Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
- Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
- Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
- Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
- Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
- Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
- Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
- Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
- 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
- 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
- Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

Source: United Nations Statistics Division, 'Official list of MDG Indicators' [January 1 2008], available at <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Host.aspx?Content=Indicators/OfficialList.htm>, and United Nations A/RES/70/1.

The new goals present a shift in focus and a more general ambition than is to be found in the MDGs, not merely reflecting an increase in the number of goals sought, as **Table 1** may suggest. Specific disease threats (MDG 6) and specific health goals (MDG 4, 5) are still of concern, but they have been demoted to the level of targets within the SDGs, subsumed under a more general call to 'ensure healthy lives and promote well-being' (SDG targets 3.1-3.4 and SDG 3; the 167 targets are not presented in Table 1). Gender equality and women's empowerment remain within a single, clear goal (MDG 3, SDG 5), with the aim that we not just 'promote,' but 'achieve' these goals, for girls as well as women. MDG 1, 'Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger' expands in scope as 'End poverty in all its forms everywhere,' and hunger, a target contained within MDG 1, is elevated within SDG 2. Goals for education are expanded beyond an implicit focus upon youth and early adult literacy, to 'promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.' Language shifts explicitly towards inclusiveness: the expression 'for all,' which was absent from all MDG goals and targets before revisions in 2005, appears in six of the new goals, along with an explicit call to 'Reduce inequality within and among countries.' A goal of universal access to energy resources is new (SDG 7), and universal employment is brought to the fore (SDG 8). Country infrastructure and urbanization have come to receive explicit mention (SDG 6, 7, 9, 10).

The 'Global Partnership for Sustainable Development' returns in the new goals with an important change: in the detailed targets and indicators of MDG 8, the partnership focused upon official development assistance, access to international markets, and debt sustainability. Within SDG 17 'Finance,' replaces official development assistance, and 'investment promotion regimes for least developed countries' and 'Multi-stakeholder partnerships' now receiving mention. These terms reflect an implicit expansion of the partnership to involve multinational enterprise, international capital, and new arrangements of multilateral, private donor, and social enterprise partnership

that have arisen following the creation of grand new ventures, including the UN Foundation in 1998 and the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in 2002. The greatest change, reflected also in the new name for the goals, is the redistribution of the MDG focus upon environmental sustainability (MDG 7) to many varieties of sustainability across specific dimensions: sustainability in energy, economic growth, industrialization, marine resource use, agriculture, production, consumption, habitation patterns, water and sanitation. Combatting climate change and the preservation of terrestrial and marine environments each receive explicit treatment as goals (SDG 13, 14, 15).

The forum articles in this issue provide comment on specific goals and the general project of the SDGs. Paula Casal and Nicole Selamé ask whether ‘Sea for the landlocked’ should have been elevated to the status of a goal. The topic does have place in the SDG targets, but concerns of landlocked states and the possibilities for addressing them are generally less familiar to readers than are the concerns of the small island states with which they are often twinned in policy documents. Casal and Selamé provide illustrative history, particularly from Tibet, Ethiopia and Bolivia; they discuss solutions found in territory swaps and transit corridors; they note proposals for tunnels and artificial island in the sea; and they consider the theoretical significance of such access upon cosmopolitan responsibility, territorial rights and national sovereignty. Scott Wisor, in “On the structure of global development goals,” specifically examines some of the new goals and presents a general consideration of the grand plan of such goals. He finds the SDGs troubling in their vagueness and insufficient as guides to international cooperation due to idealized, aspirational language that is also found in the MDGs. He finds the new goals to be greatly inflated by the calls of advocacy organizations, which impairs their function as effective, sharp tools for organizing practical activity. He suggests that less is more: that tradeoffs must be accepted and that decisions regarding choices for policy and benchmarks of achievement must be more clearly articulated within the goals.

Frances Stewart and Johannes Waldmueller close the forum with very different general reflections on the Goals. Stewart, a development economist engaged particularly with UNICEF and UNDP programs over the past forty years, brings familiarity and a wealth of understanding of such initiatives. She strikes a very hopeful note in her reflection on these goals and their prospects; she finds that their formulation is more definitive than those agreed to in the previous round. She suggests a particular need for clear attention to integration of development objectives with the strong focus upon sustainability, particularly noting a need to address non-sustainable practices of in capitalism that are evident in contemporary economic globalization. Stewart also presents the ideal that 'to secure sensible priorities ... what is needed is for each country to set its own goals,' perhaps through a 'national commission to translate the goals into specific objectives,' treating the SDG's as 'principles.' For non-sustainable practices, she suggests accounting standards and economic growth policies that reflect a commitment to 'green growth.' Johannes Waldmueller argues that accounting for progress towards commitments such as Stewart and Wisor advocate is unnecessarily bureaucratic, drawing attention to intergovernmental policy and national political decision-making, thus drawing it away from diverse and local problem-solving. Waldmueller sees the current SDG approach as a modern strategy that embodies "a colonial matrix of power" in which local approaches of subaltern peoples are subject to "coloniality of knowledge." Waldmueller's criticism is not dismissive of the grand goals of the politicians: rather, within a detailed examination of the focus upon hunger and food security embodied in SDG2, he finds value in the global funding effort. He suggests devolution of practical decision-making to locally conceived agro-ecological strategies, and compatible funding, rather than support of the more globally recognizable but less locally sustainable approaches to be found in modern industrial agriculture and agribusiness.

The Discussion Note article by Jan Pronk that closes this issue of *Journal of Global Ethics* also supplements this Forum elegantly and helpfully, providing a detailed elaboration of changing aspirations for international development and changing shapes

for international projects from 1945 to present. Pronk has been an observer of these projects for perhaps half a century, and has been a participant at least since he began his term as Minister for Development Cooperation for the Netherlands in 1973. His personal and humane view of the path traveled and the path forward from 2015 is invaluable as a document of testimony and as keen analysis of how ideals of development and global justice have been conceived and so may be re-conceived.

The balance of this introduction completes a sketch of the process through which the SDGs were created, and it concludes with some critical comment upon that process. It continues the sketch of the UN process that is to be found in *Journal of Global Ethics* volume 11 issue 1, which presents an account of the process up to fall 2014. This paragraph summarizes that sketch, thus: The SDGs are born of a 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, often called the 'Rio + 20' conference, which follows the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The Rio + 20 outcome document, *The Future We Want*, established a process for development planning that advanced along three avenues: political, financial, and public. Along the first avenue, recommendations and visions for the goals were voiced by an *ad hoc* advisory group, the Secretary General's High-level panel of Eminent Persons to the post-2015 Development Agenda, in a single May 2013 outcome report.¹⁴ Their work was followed by meetings of a High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in September 2013 and another in July 2014.¹⁵ Along the second avenue, an

¹⁴ The Secretary-General's High-level panel of eminent persons is not mentioned in the Rio + 20 document of 2012, and it was announced shortly after that document's adoption as 'the Secretary General's post-2015 initiative mandated by the 2010 MDG Summit.' No such panel is mentioned in the 2010 outcome document (A/RES/65/1). See 'UN Secretary-General appoints high-level panel,' [31 July 2012], <http://www.un.org/sg/management/pdf/PRpost2015.pdf>. For the panel's report, see <http://www.un.org/sg/management/hlppost2015.shtml>.

¹⁵ *A New Global Partnership*, available at http://www.un.org/sg/management/pdf/HLP_P2015_Report.pdf; *Summary of the First Meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development* (UN A/68/588), *Adoption of the ministerial declaration of the high-level political forum* (E/2014/L.22-

Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing (ICESD) was given charge of studying finance needs, models and policy arrangements in consultation with 'Member States, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, business sector and other major groups.' Their work was completed in August 2014, with a brief report that displayed very limited public consultation. (A/69/315).¹⁶ The third avenue for development of these goals significantly distinguishes this process from that of the previous round of MDGs, and from much UN work of this sort pursued in the past. An Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG) was established in January 2013 to engage in an extensive public consultation process, soliciting opinions on priorities and on early draft formulations of the goals from states, peoples, faith communities, academe, civil society organizations and intergovernmental organizations (such as the International Labor Organization).¹⁷ The meeting process of the OWG was the most elaborate of those developed within the three groups, consisting of thirteen sessions of consultation over sixteen months and various open opportunities for organizations and individuals to provide online written comment concerning development priorities and the goals as they were formulated in drafts. The OWG was ultimately responsible for drafting goals in a final report in August 2014, which contained 17 draft goals and 167 targets that articulate the general aspirations of the goals.

The goals and targets adopted by the UN this past September track very closely with the OWG recommendations.¹⁸ Since the submission of final reports and the

E/HLPF/2014/L.3), available at

http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/2014/L.22&Lang=E.

¹⁶ Committee documents may be found at

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/intergovernmental/financecommittee>.

¹⁷ Committee documents of the Open Working Group are assembled at

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/owg.html>.

¹⁸ Noteworthy changes from the OWG draft of August 12 2014 (A/68/970) to the August 1 2015 UN draft for the 'intergovernmental negotiation process' include the following: In material that is distinct from the text of the goals, paragraphs 1-59, contain largely new material, and 60-91 contain entirely new material. Within the goals text: Target 3.2: Explicit targets introduced for child mortality; 8.7: 'end modern slavery and human

formulation of the goals in August 2014, the financing and working group committees have disbanded: their work is considered to be complete.¹⁹ I will argue in what follows that the creation, activity and especially the retirement of these committees is of importance concerning the public character of coming decisions and regarding accountability among nations and at the UN as *The 2030 Agenda* proceeds forward to its close in 2030. Because the OWG, the committee with which the public has primarily interacted, has been dissolved, the accountability of those with whom the public has consulted is also discharged.²⁰ Such an administrative change is of importance, for, as administration evolves, accountability comes to be obscured. Even what constitutes a commitment in this context is open to much interpretation, and for that reason also, accountability is diminished when institutions such as the OWG are retired.

To display the vagaries of accountability for commitments made by nations in this context, consider a detailed example: the development of Millennium Development

trafficking' is added; 15.3: The target date to 'combat desertification' is pushed back from 2020 to 2030; 17.2: 'ODA providers are encouraged to consider setting a target to provide at least 0.20 per cent of ODA/GNI to least developed countries' is added. In various entries the phrase in the 2014 document 'by [x] per cent' is replaced with 'substantial' / 'substantially' / 'a substantial proportion', etc.

For notes on final amendments (found in *The 2030 Agenda* draft released August 12 (A/69/L.85)), see International Institute for Sustainable Development, 'News: UNGA President circulates Amended 2030 Agenda' [12 August 2015], <http://sd.iisd.org/news/unga-president-circulates-amended-2030-agenda/>. For interpretation of those changes, see Social Watch, 'U.N. post-2015 development agenda adopted amidst closed-door deals,' at <http://www.socialwatch.org/node/17008>.

¹⁹ The Secretary-General's High-level panel of eminent persons seems to have outlasted the other temporary groups, with the 'former members' providing the Secretary-General a 'One year on' follow-up report in advance of the UN meetings this past September. Available at <http://www.un.org/sg/management/hlppost2015.shtml>.

²⁰ For a discussion of areas in which such accountability might be of importance, see the Third World Network report on the closing sessions of the Open Working Group, 'Conflict zones in the SDG negotiations,' <http://www.twn.my/title2/unsd/2014/unsd140801.htm>. See also the concerns voiced by the Campaign for Peoples' Goals for Sustainable Development, 'OWG Final Outcome Document Falls Short of Commitment to Development Justice for Post-2015' [18 August 2014], <http://peoplesgoals.org/download/CPG%20Response%20to%20OWG%20Outcome%20Document.pdf>.

Goal 1, ‘Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger,’ and the commitments that have been made by nations in the process of endorsing that goal. MDG1 was first articulated in a pair of commendable targets that are clearly less ambitious than the goal itself (‘Target 1: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day; Target 2: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger’).²¹ Perhaps the commitments nations have made can be reconciled by noting that Goal 1 was not actually stated in the *Millennium Declaration* (A/RES/55/2): it may be found instead in the Secretary-General’s *Road map towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration*, issued a year later (A/56/326). The content of the General Assembly’s actual commitment, which was expressed in one bullet point within the *Millennium Declaration*, was also re-distributed across two goals in the Secretary-General’s follow-up document. The *Millennium Declaration* included a third objective alongside the two objectives noted above: that objective, ‘halve the proportion of people who are unable to reach or to afford safe drinking water,’ found its way into a target under Goal 7 (‘Ensure environmental sustainability’). Re-distribution of these commitments may express a re-interpretation of the idea of what is integral, or is most fundamental to development. It also allows for the possibility of declaring success in achieving a goal – or the lesser targets, anyway – without actually meeting the original commitment. *Vice versa*, it could serve to allow nations an opportunity to meet one commitment without necessarily having achieved the two goals.

Even so simple a term as ‘half’ may be worthy of critical scrutiny in this context, as is seen in the simple ideal of ‘halving the world’s poverty and hunger.’ Thomas Pogge has reminded us that the target of halving the *proportion* of hungry or undernourished people is a far less ambitious goal for a growing world than halving the *number* of hungry people. The latter goal is to be found in a commitment made by 112 nations four years earlier at the UN Food and Agriculture Organization’s World Food Summit in

²¹ A list of revised targets, with revisions dating to 2007 that followed General Assembly discussion in 2005, may be found at <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Resources/Attach/Indicators/OfficialList2008.pdf>.

Rome.²² The Secretary-General's report of 2001 notes that, on this issue, the *Millennium Declaration* 'reaffirmed the commitments agreed at the World Summit for Social Development,' but it remains mute about the commitment of the *Rome Declaration*, despite that the Rome Summit, which is mentioned in the Secretary-General's text just a paragraph later, followed the World Summit by a year; and so it might be taken to supersede the World Summit.²³ It is also not apparent that the World Summit commitment has really been honored: a list of specific targets in 'Annex 2' is keyed to closing dates of 2000 and 2015. Among these is 'By the year 2000, a reduction of severe and moderate malnutrition among children under five years of age by half of the 1990 level.'²⁴ Some among the World Summit targets appear to have been missed before the Millennium targets, which were also keyed to 1990 start dates, were even proposed.

What is it, for a nation or an intergovernmental organization to live up to its commitments, when they are so entangled, and open to re-interpretation? This history of MDG 1 indicates that our judgment concerning the achievement of the SDGs should be an ongoing interpretive process that considers a layered and changing political system of nations and of intergovernmental organizations that affirm different commitments through diverse bodies. The bodies refer to other bodies' commitments as they formulate their own, but the bodies referred to are manifold and incommensurable. The General Assembly is distinct from the Secretary-General's office, as are their commitments to differently framed goals. Both are distinguishable from ECOSOC and its functional commissions, such as the Commission on Social Development, which hosted the World Summit for Social Development. 'Specialized agencies' such as the Food and Agriculture Organization diverge further: they have distinct 'affiliation' with the UN and they hold their own annual conferences of members in which

²² UN Food and Agriculture Organization, *Rome Declaration on Food Security*, available at <http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/w3613e/w3613e00.HTM>. See also 'The first UN Millennium Development Goal: A cause for celebration?' in Thomas Pogge, *Politics as Usual: What Lies Behind the Pro-poor Rhetoric*. Cambridge: Polity, 2010, 57–73.

²³ A/56/326 paragraphs 88, 89.

²⁴ Report of the World Summit for Social Development (A/CONF/166/9), Annex 2, section 36.

commitments are made and are reported to the UN.²⁵ Some inconsistencies may be resolved: the General Assembly has reconciled some commitments by affirming the MDGs at the 2005 World Summit. But the goals they affirmed were not exactly as stated in the Secretary-General's report, they were the goals *circa* 2003, which were also altered before approval in 2005, with changes including a new and very different target added under MDG 1 ('Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people').²⁶ So, perhaps the UN harmonizes some of its ongoing commitments, but it has not resolved the inconsistencies that remain unaddressed, for example, from the Rome Summit.

The history suggests that we should assess achievements by considering diverse interpretations of the specific commitments, and we should also revise the appraisal over the fifteen year span in light of evolving scientific understanding of people and their environment, for example, adjusting for economic change,²⁷ improving practices in public health, and better understanding of the drivers of climate change. For this process, public consultation is vital, as is public discussion, including public interpretation of whether commitments have actually been met. The creation of a UN working group is important insofar as it creates a publicly accessible locus for discussion, assimilation of the discussion into policy, and accountability; its subsequent demise is also of importance, for it leaves in its absence a different organizational geography, with diminished capacity for interpreting discussion and a cloud of organizational

²⁵ See United Nations, 'Funds, Programs, Specialized Agencies, and Others,' <http://www.un.org/en/sections/about-un/funds-programmes-specialized-agencies-and-others/index.html>.

²⁶ For the goals as formulated in 2003, see <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Resources/Attach/Indicators/OfficialList2003.pdf>. The UN general assembly re-visited the goals in 2005 and in 2010, see A/RES/60/1 and A/RES/65/1. For a brief history of changes to the goals up to 2008, see UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 'The United Nations Development Agenda: Development for All,' (ST/ESA/316, 2007) http://www.un.org/esa/devagenda/UNDA_BW5_Final.pdf.

²⁷ See Franco Ferreira, 'The international poverty line has just been raised to \$1.90/day...' The World Bank, <http://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/international-poverty-line-has-just-been-raised-190-day-global-poverty-basically-unchanged-how-even>.

commitments where accountability once was to be found. In contrast to the *ad hoc* financing and working groups – both charged with different forms of external consultation, and both retired in summer 2014 – the HLPF continues to meet and to be heard in a report delivered in July 2015 and with others forthcoming in July 2016, and so on. There are no plans for disbanding the committee, though its charge was formulated alongside those of the other two in the Rio + 20 outcome document, *The Future We Want*;²⁸ it continues as the organizational successor to the now retired Commission on Social Development, which was established by the original Rio conference of 1992.²⁹ The HLPF is ‘the central UN platform for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;’ it operates under the auspices of both the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which holds general responsibility for coordination of planning, implementation, and further consultation in the process of the development of the SDGs.³⁰ The new avenues for budget design and public input regarding the SDGs dead-ended over a year ago, and it appears that the fine-tuning and the interpretation of the goals, from that time forward, has been the purview of more traditional UN bodies, with different relations to the public and, one might infer from recent and planned activity, diminished responsibility for public consultation. Consultation now lies in the hands of the administration of ECOSOC and HLPF, but open consultation does not, at this point, appear prominently in future plans indicated by these UN bodies.³¹

²⁸ See the Rio + 20 outcome document, *The Future We Want* (A/RES/66/288*), which indicates the creation of three committees at paragraphs 84 (HLPF), 248-9 (OWG), and 255 (ICESD).

²⁹ See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/intergovernmental/csd>, and *Lessons Learned from the Commission on Sustainable Development* (A/67/757).

³⁰ See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>, and <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/intergovernmental/ecosoc>.

³¹ As of November 4 2015, ECOSOC makes no mention of future consultations at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/intergovernmental/ecosoc>; HLPF provides access to one informational submission form (at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>) and no indication of attendant responsibility to report input or gather the public for discussions.

The public consultation process was reduced significantly following the OWG's presentation of goals and targets to the UN in August 2014. That process finished well before the final product was formed: additions and some changes in the text have arisen through negotiations, and indeed, the SDGs have yet to be finally settled, despite national commitments to goals and targets that were made this past September. Like the Millennium Development Goals that precede them, the SDGs are elaborated as goals, targets, and indicators.³² Indicators are the measurements that mark the achievement of the targets, which themselves provide the marker of the achievement of the Goals. In the OWG draft document, and in the *2030 Agenda*, indicators are not present and many of the 169 targets are finessed through phrases such as 'substantial' / 'substantially' / 'a substantial proportion', etc. Thus, targets are still to be limned through review of forums for expert consultation (closed in September 2015) and further negotiation over the indicators, over a thousand of which are scheduled for consideration and winnowing in March 2016.³³

Public consultation and public discourse – carried out in regular, visible forums that allow the space for collective and individual voices to discuss the ends and means of sustainable development – will be vital to making the process over the coming fifteen years one of genuine development, rather than a political push. The HLPF will provide some space for input concerning the process toward achievement of the goals, but it is not evident that voices are as welcome as they were, and it is not clear such voices will receive the hearing they did in the OWG, which coordinated an extraordinary public

³² For an explanation of this scheme, see Nicole Bates-Eamer *et al.*, *Post-2015 Development Agenda: Goals, Targets and Indicators Special Report*. Centre for International Governance Innovation (Canada) and the Korea Development Institute, pp. 6-8 (available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/775cigi.pdf>); and see UN A/68/970 section 18.

³³ For critical comment on that process, see Casey Dunning, 'SDG Negotiations Round 3: Indicators,' <http://www.cgdev.org/blog/sdg-negotiations-round-3-indicators> and see the site of the UN Inter-agency Expert Group on SDG Indicators, <http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/iaeg-sdgs/>.

consultation process. The retirement of the OWG returns consultation to its former condition and status within the processes of the UN.

The public process evident at the meetings in September 2015 included many side events that allowed well-organized and well-positioned groups to voice their concerns. Whether they were heard, and how their voices will come to be treated, is less clear than it was during the period of operation of the OWG. The meetings displayed a shift away from consultation and from specific responsibility to those consulted, displaying instead a strategy for enrolling broad public endorsement. A UN-sponsored non-governmental and corporate partnership simplified and re-branded the Sustainable Development Goals as ‘The Global Goals,’ and supplemented them with a merchandise portal and iPhone app.³⁴ The words ‘Sustainable’ and ‘Development’ were left aside for the sake of alliteration and brevity, and the specific goals were similarly recast to five words or less. What may have been lost in a well-intentioned effort to make the goals ‘famous’ was the opportunity to make them generally understood and thoughtfully discussed.

³⁴ A first appraisal of this publicity effort and its connections to business is provided by Barbara Adams, ‘Public SDGs or Private GGs?’ <https://www.globalpolicywatch.org/blog/2015/09/25/public-sdgs-or-private-ggs>. The Global Goals site [www.globalgoals](http://www.globalgoals.org) is maintained by parent organization Project Everyone (www.project-everyone.org), which includes several UN organizations among its partners.