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## COALITION FOR SUSTAINABLE CITIES & REGIONS IN THE NEW UN DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

### Frequently Asked Questions on the UN Sustainable Development Goals

*Updated 21st July 2014 by the Communitas Secretariat*

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#### **Q: What is Communitas?**

Communitas is the Coalition for Sustainable Cities & Regions in the New UN Development Agenda. It is led by its core partners - Tellus Institute, ICLEI- Local Governments for Sustainability, nrg4SD- Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development and UN-Habitat - with the support of the Ford Foundation and the Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation. Our technical methodology is based on thematic work groups led by experts and practitioners producing issues papers with proposals for a stand alone urban Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) and urban targets in close consultation with a multi-stakeholder advisory committee.

#### **Q: What are the Sustainable Development Goals?**

In June 2012, governments agreed at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (also known as Rio+20 or Earth Summit 2012) to launch a UN led process to create a set of "a set of SDGs that are universal, limited in number, aspirational, easy to communicate and address the three dimensions of sustainable development in a holistic manner." The emerging Sustainable Development Goals are to officially succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) - a set of eight international goals aiming to accelerate development in the world's poorest countries - at a special MDGs-SDGs Summit in September 2015.

At Rio+20, it was agreed that the SDGs should be consistent with international law, build upon existing international commitments and contribute to the full implementation of the outcomes of all major summits in the economic, social and environmental fields, such as Agenda 21 and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and respect the Rio Principles.

Established in January 2013, the UN SDGs Open Working Group (SDGs OWG) was tasked with proposing an aspirational set of goals and targets to the UN General Assembly by September 2014. The Group featured a system of representation that was new to limited membership

bodies of the General Assembly, in which 70 member-states shared 30 seats. This means that most of the seats in the OWG are shared by two or three countries (often referred to as a “troika”).

After holding eight thematic sessions between March 2013 and February 2014, the Co-Chairs of the SDGs OWG (H.E. Mr. Csaba Kőrösi, Permanent Representative of Hungary, and H.E. Mr. Macharia Kamau, Permanent Representative of Kenya) released **19 focus areas** for consideration in the SDGs.

### **Q: What are the latest steps taken by the SDGs Open Working Group?**

In March 2014, the Open Working Group transitioned to a negotiation phase, holding five sessions between March and July 2014. After 18 months and a final session that featured a 16-hour marathon of overnight negotiations, the SDGs Open Working Group approved by consensus 17 goals and 169 targets. The full report is available at: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/4518Outcome%20SDGs.pdf>

The SDGs proposed by the Open Working Group are as follows:

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

The General Assembly will continue SDG negotiations within its traditional member-state system of representation (i.e. removing the “troikas”). Negotiations will be based on the Secretary-General’s Report in Q4 2014, culminating in a MDGs-SDGs Summit in Sept. 2015.

**Q: How do ‘Sustainable Cities & Human Settlements’ fit within the SDGs?**

The theme of “Sustainable Cities & Human Settlements” has played a key role in the SDG debate since Rio+20. It has been officially included in several key documents:

- “The Future We Want” by the Rio+20 Conference on Sust. Development (July 2012): [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/66/288&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/66/288&Lang=E)
- “A New Global Partnership” by the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons (May 2013): <http://www.post2015hlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/UN-Report.pdf>
- “A Life of Dignity for All” by the UN Secretary-General (July 2013): <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/A%20Life%20of%20Dignity%20for%20All.pdf>
- “SDG Focus Areas” by the co-Chairs, SDGs Open Working Group (Feb 2014): <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/3276focusareas.pdf>

**Q: What significant changes have been made in the Final SDGs Report?**

**11.1** Language on slums has been simplified to read, “upgrade slums.” The phrase “prevent slums” did not find its way back into the text, nor did the term “informal settlements.” Land tenure has also disappeared from this target, although it is now addressed under SDG1 on poverty and SDG2 on food security, nutrition and agriculture. This target now starts with the verb “ensure,” in line with Communitas’ First and Second Draft Target Proposals.

**11.2** References to transport “systems” and “road safety” have been added, while a detailed enumeration of vulnerable and specific groups remains. A strong nod to public transport has survived in this target and Communitas is proud to see many of its own technical contributions on transport.

**11.3** This target has lost its outcome-oriented clause “Reduce urban sprawl,” which is replaced by “Enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization.” Planning and management, however, are still referred to at the target level (i.e. not as Means of Implementation or Indicators). Urban sprawl has been deleted on the grounds of national sovereignty, with the curious implication that it would deter governments from building new cities. Sprawl reduction could ultimately be re-inserted in this target, or as an indicator, or as a component of MOI Paragraph 11.a. Communitas has persistently advocated for participatory planning and management, which played a key role across the Coalition’s six thematic work groups and subsequent targets.

**11.4** Unchanged in the final text, despite some delegations questioning the pertinence of this target, as well as its transformative potential. Communitas continues to link cultural & natural heritage, social cohesion and personal safety to its proposed target on public and green space.

**11.5** This remains a very outcomes-oriented target. The reduction of deaths is now complemented by the reduction of people affected. The scale for economic losses is now relative to GDP, helping to compare cities of varying sizes. Water-related disasters are again singled out. Disaster prevention is now addressed under MOI Paragraph 11.b. This should also be read in conjunction with several resilience targets in the SDGs framework. For example, Target 1.5 on resilience of the poor, Target 2.4 on resilient agricultural practices, Target 14.2 on resilience of coastal ecosystems, and SDG9 on resilient infrastructure. Communitas' contributions on resilience stem from issues papers produced by thematic work groups. Target 11.5 is consistent with the Coalition's proposal "to reduce the loss of lives, assets, housing and infrastructure."

**11.6** This target remains largely unchanged. After its removal due to the controversial reference to "ecological footprint," it was inserted as a standalone target during the final days of negotiations. In line with Communitas proposals, a focus has been added on "air quality, municipal and other waste management," guiding the possible indicators for this target. Communitas targets have had a strong environmental dimension since their first draft iteration.

**11.7** Green and public space also remains unchanged, retaining the enumeration of groups. This was consolidated in the final days of the Open Working Group, and is also in line with the Coalition's long-standing support for green space.

**11.a** Language on rural urban synergies remains unchanged. This language was crowdsourced by Communitas and submitted to the Open Working Group in May. Rural-urban synergies have been a main focus for the Communitas Coalition since its inception in September 2013, playing a prominent role across six thematic work groups producing issues papers and technical proposals for targets in the SDGs.

**11.b** Now features the addition of, "develop and implement in line with the forthcoming Hyogo Framework holistic disaster risk management at all levels." The latter was added during the OWG's final hours and has bolstered Means of Implementation and in effect the overall SDG, deploying a two-pronged approach to disaster risk management. The review of the Hyogo Framework is imminent. The target retains a long enumeration covering inclusion, climate, resource efficiency and risk. It confirms SDG11 as a placeholder for Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) and Climate. This was one of the main target areas in Communitas' first draft targets, and the enumeration addresses several of the Coalition's work group themes, including a particular focus on inclusion. Communitas has refined targets on SCP within planetary boundaries and risk prevention and management since last autumn.

**11.c** Language remains unchanged. This has been a particular request from the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), which may present some interesting opportunities for decentralized cooperation.

**Q: What are the latest steps taken by the President of the General Assembly?**

The President of the General Assembly (PGA) has convened a series of six thematic debates and high-level events concluding in June 2014 featuring core aspects of the post-2015 UN Development Agenda.

18-19 February: Water, sanitation and sustainable energy  
6-7 March: Contributions of women, young and civil society  
9-10 April: Partnerships  
24-25 April: Stable and peaceful societies  
21-22 May: North-South, South-South, and triangular cooperation and ICT for development  
9-10 June: Human rights and rule of law

These are all open to civil society and the PGA H.E. John W. Ashe has been highly inclusive in collecting inputs from major groups and other stakeholders. A stock-taking exercise has been announced for 8-9th September 2014, with the aim of gathering inputs from all parallel post-2015 processes.

**Q: What steps has Communitas taken in the process?**

The following is a snapshot of Communitas' inputs to the SDGs process. For a complete Interim Report of Activities, please visit: [http://communitascoalition.org/pdf/interim\\_report.pdf](http://communitascoalition.org/pdf/interim_report.pdf)

**Thematic Work Groups and the Experts' Workshop on Sustainable Cities & Human Settlements, 5-6 Dec 2013**

In Autumn 2013, the Communitas Coalition set up six thematic work groups led by experts in close consultation with a multi-stakeholder advisory committee. The groups produced six thematic issues papers, which contained a stock taking exercise and proposals for urban targets. The draft issues papers were presented and discussed in December 2013 at UN Headquarters during an Experts' Workshop on Sustainable Cities & Human Settlements in the SDGs that Communitas organised (in collaboration with UN DESA and the Group of Member States Friends of Sustainable Cities, Major Groups & Stakeholders and the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network [UN SDSN]). The workshop - made possible by the generous support of the Ford Foundation and the European Union - served to enable governments to discuss informally with experts, Major Groups and stakeholders and the UN system the issue of sustainable urbanization in the future SDGs framework and the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda.

**Side Event, 7th Session of the SDGs Open Working Group, 6 Jan 2014**

Communitas held an official Side Event 6th January 2014 on Sustainable Cities & Human Settlements in the SDGs, based on the realities of subnational and local practice. The side event took place during the 7th Session of the SDGs Open Working Group - parallel to international discussions on the role of sustainable urbanization in the post-2015 UN development agenda.

**First Draft Targets, February 2014**

On the basis of multi-stakeholder discussions held at the Experts' Workshop and ahead of the 7th session of UN Intergovernmental Group (OWG) on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in January 2014 - dedicated to stocktaking on the theme of Sustainable Cities & Human Settlements - the Communitas Secretariat released first draft proposals for urban targets for a stand alone urban SDG. At that time, the Communitas Secretariat identified a "clustered

approach” for developing target proposals for input to the SDGs OWG stocktaking exercise. The five target clusters identified by the Communitas Secretariat at that time were:

- I. Fundamental Urban Patterns - The importance of urban planning and design and spatial configuration in shaping the ability of cities to reach other targets
- II. Urban Life of Dignity for All - Ensuring justice and equity by meeting basic needs such as housing, public services (water & sanitation, energy, waste management), and jobs
- III. Governance & Accountability - Mechanisms for participatory decision-making (including marginalized, slum-dwellers, youth, women), accountability & transparency, and multi-level governance
- IV. Enabling Policies - National urban policies, financing and technical assistance, provision of data
- V. Territorial Dimension of Other SDG Areas – City regions’ role in other SDG themes such as sustainable food, energy & climate resilience

#### **Unpacking Targets for the Urban SDG, World Urban Forum, 7 Apr 2014**

Communitas held its target consultations at the 7th World Forum in Medellin, Colombia. The event's objective was to create a bridge between the World Urban Forum and the SDGs Open Working Group (SDGs OWG) in New York, effectively connecting leading urban innovators to the Group's final formulation of sustainable development goals. In the short-term, this helped urban advocates to better understand the SDGs process and the role of “sustainable cities & human settlements” therein. In the medium-term, the event is helping city changers to shape and anticipate SDG targets. In the long-term, it will bolster local and subnational efforts to make a potential urban SDG a reality on the ground.

#### **Technical Briefing on the Rural Urban Nexus, 22 May 2014**

Intergovernmental discussions at the UN Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) confirmed that addressing the themes of sustainable cities & human settlements and rural development in a complementary and mutually reinforcing manner would be essential in the elaboration of a transformative SDG framework of universal value. Discussions showed particular interest in the implications of a complementary approach to sustainable urban and rural development, in particular for an agenda related to infrastructure and access to services; both of which underline more inclusive patterns of growth spanning rural and urban areas. Moreover, the discussion recognized that the rural urban nexus extends well beyond the provision of agricultural goods to urban centers or the encroachment of rapidly growing urban areas on the rural space.

As discussion within the OWG evolved, it remained unclear how this important dimension would be integrated into the SDG framework. This briefing sought to provide the technical space required to address this question and to unpack the topic of how to foster an integrated approach to promoting development across the rural urban continuum in the SDGs. The Communitas Coalition for Sustainable Cities & Regions in the New UN Development Agenda



and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) came together to provide this opportunity to examine the issue and to take a closer look at the feasibility and transformative potential of some of the proposals on the table.

### Second Draft Targets, June 2014

**Target 1.** By 2030, improve the living and working conditions of both rural and urban dwellers by promoting the social, economic and environmental synergies between urban and rural areas, with particular attention to equity, infrastructure needs, land use and planning, financial inclusion, access to markets and natural resources management

**Target 2.** By 2030, eliminate slum-like conditions everywhere and ensure universal access to affordable, equitable, and sustainable land, housing and basic services for all rural and urban dwellers.

**Target 3.** By 2030, increase capacity for participatory integrated spatial and urban planning & management in all levels of government to reduce urban sprawl and the environmental impact of cities and promote balanced territorial development across both rural and urban areas.

**Target 4.** By 2030, ensure universal access to inclusive, safe and green public space for enhanced social cohesion, the safety of citizens and the protection and promotion of cultural & natural heritage.

**Target 5.** By 2030, strengthen integrated resilience to climate change, man-made and natural disasters to reduce the loss of lives, assets, housing and infrastructure and ensure continuity of services in urban and rural areas.

**Target 6.** By 2030, provide universal access to affordable, equitable, safe and sustainable urban and peri-urban transport for connected and healthy communities.

**Target 7.** By 2030, reduce the environmental impacts of cities and improve urban environmental with participatory policies that protect urban biodiversity reduce urban pollution by x% and increase waste water and solid waste recycling by x%.

These targets were published and distributed to the SDGs Open Working Group, in addition to a matrix of targets and indicators, submitted at the final session of the SDGs OWG. The matrix is available at: [http://communitascoalition.org/pdf/matrix\\_targets\\_indicators.pdf](http://communitascoalition.org/pdf/matrix_targets_indicators.pdf)

### Ongoing Engagement with the Group of Friends for Sustainable Cities & SDGs OWG

In partnership with co-chairs Sweden and Singapore, the Communitas Coalition has provided ongoing technical input to “Member-States Friends of Cities,” a loose grouping of countries that came out of the Rio+20 Outcome Document. This is a vital step in the process of mobilizing member-states around urban targets for the SDGs. The Communitas Secretariat is also highly present at each session of the SDGs Open Working Group.

### Preparation for the Coalition's Phase III in 2015

Targets and indicators will be piloted in individual projects during the third and final phase of Communitas. The objective of these projects is to, on the one hand, in the horizon of Habitat III

help establish methodologies for the implementation of an urban SDG and urban targets. On the other hand, in a longer time-frame, leave a legacy of new partnerships, as well as of SDGs implementation at the city-region level. The scope can be extended to the localization of other relevant SDGs beyond an urban SDG. The pilots are conceived in a multi-level governance and multi-stakeholder approach. For each pilot, an agreement between the relevant government agencies and a multi-stakeholder partnership for action will constitute the foundations of its governance. Initially 5 pilot projects are envisaged (one per UN world region), spanning diverse landscapes and cultures and providing visibility of impact at the global scale.