

Sustainable Development Goals

The first official ["zero" draft](#) of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) was published on 2 June 2015. These goals will replace the millennium development goals (MDGs), which expire at the end of 2015. The MDGs have provided a focal point for development action since 2000, but have been criticised for being too narrow and for only applying targets to poor countries. The SDGs aim to expand the objectives to all nations, using a wider framework of [17 core goals](#), broken down into 169 targets, to direct the global strategy over the next 15 years.

Appropriate, testable and comparable statistics will be crucial for the monitoring of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and to serve as a management mechanism to help countries to develop strategies and implement accordingly.

An Inter-agency Expert Group on the Sustainable Development Goals Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) was established to develop the indicators for the post-2015 agenda, and met in early June to shape the road map to March 2016 when the final indicators are decided. Representatives from National Statistics Offices of 28 regionally balanced member states, who comprise the IAEG-SDGs, believed 100 to be the maximum number of indicators for which data can be gathered and meaningfully compared internationally. Beyond these core indicators, countries should select [Complementary National Indicators](#) that are most appropriate to national needs and capacities.

Environmental conservation

As the name suggests, a sustainable future is the ultimate goal of the SDGs. Central to achieving this are additions to the previous framework, including new goals for water and

sanitation, climate change, affordable energy and mitigating the pressure of expanding urban areas. The associated core indicators have been criticised, however, for the lack of differentiated responsibility among nations. Reducing waste through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse, for example, focuses on the national recycling rate for example, ignoring that developing countries recycle less but also generate less waste. Other indicators monitor [counter-intuitive measures](#), which may lead to misinterpretation, such as examining the sustainability of marine resources through analysing fisheries as a per cent of GDP, ignoring that an increase would indicate less sustainability rather than more.

Family planning and women's rights

Inclusivity and equality is a key theme throughout the zero draft, pledging that nobody will be left behind. Goal five focuses on gender equality and aims to empower all women and girls with targets focused on tackling violence against women; early, child and forced marriage and female genital mutilation; and providing universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. We celebrate the emphasis that has been placed on women's rights due to the disruptive impact of issues, such as [child marriage](#), on girls' education, health and wider population concerns.

Sexual and reproductive health has also been singled out in target 5.6 that aims to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services, including family planning, information and education, by 2030. To measure family planning, the proposed indicator is the number of women of reproductive age who wish to space or prevent children and are using a modern method of contraception. Disputes over

definitions have proved central to controversy around this indicator, including classifying ‘modern’ and defining the boundaries of ‘reproductive age’. Focusing on women aged between 15 and 49 risks ignoring the lost and altered lives that prove [reproduction starts before age 15](#).

Despite these criticisms the inclusion of a reproductive health target has been celebrated, emphasising the [centrality](#) of sexual and reproductive health to achieving all of the SDGs. The potential for widespread environmental and social effects is enormous as [233 million women](#) currently have an unmet need for modern family planning.

Population awareness

While population size and pressure is implicit throughout the SDGs it is not referred to explicitly at any point in the zero draft. It is striking in its absence. Providing women the means, access and agency to control their fertility has important implications for global population growth and would contribute to a shift to a more sustainable size. This focus on contraception, however, has marked a shift away from societal measures towards empowering individuals to make choices surrounding their family size.

While increasing access to contraception and improving women’s rights is a key aspect of our work, we also believe that wider issues surrounding population growth need to be tackled explicitly, which the SDGs have failed to do. Though no government should interfere with the right of parents to choose the size of their family, an explicit reference to the [consequences](#) of large families can enable people to make informed decisions.

The road to 2030

As crucial as the indicators that are chosen are the means of implementation, referring to the financing and transfer of technological capacity to achieve the goals across countries of different economic wealth. [Commentators](#) on the Millennium Development Goals and the Beijing Consensus reflect that many of the unfulfilled promised can be linked to issues around financing and implementation. [Investment](#) to address key data gaps will prove key to strengthening national capacities to collect and analyse indicators.

The SDGs mark the context in which global development will progress over the next 15 years and, as such, are significant in their vision and content. Between now and September, the SDG proposals will be debated by governments. While an explicit population target seems unlikely to be included, there is also a danger that the focus on gender equality and reproductive rights will be excluded from the [final draft](#), as some countries would like to block these initiatives. Now, more than ever, pressure to include these key issues must be sustained.