

Building Nexus Principles into the Sustainable Development Goals

A Declaration from the Co-directors of the Nexus 2014: Water, Food, Climate and Energy Conference at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, March 5th to 8th 2014

Submitted to the UN Secretary-General on the ____ of March, 2014

Some 300 delegates from 33 countries representing governments, intergovernmental organizations, academic institutions, companies, environmental and development organizations and other stakeholders met at an internationally supported¹ conference at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, from March 5th to 8th 2014 to explore how prioritizing interlinkages and an intersectoral approach could contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals currently being discussed at the United Nations and broadly to the creation and implementation of the post-2015 agenda.

The following declaration is based on discussions, research and contributions compiled during and before the Nexus 2014: Water, Food, Climate and Energy Conference and outlines how Nexus principles might best be built into the UN's forthcoming Sustainable Development Goals and the post 2015 agenda.

A comprehensive report that expands on the issues contained in this letter is available online at nexusconference.unc.edu.

We submit this declaration to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and commend it to the chairs and members of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals and to all those concerned with the post-2015 agenda and the creation of the new Sustainable Development Goals.

Sincerely,

Felix Dodds and Jamie Bartram

Nexus 2014 Conference Co-directors

¹ Conference partners included the World Bank, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Development Program, United Nations Human Settlement Programme, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, International Renewable Energy Agency, World Business Council for Sustainable Development, United Nations Global Compact, Futures Group, WWF, Stockholm Environment Institute, Millennium Institute, Global Water Partnership, Biovision and WSPA.

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Principles

1. The world is a **single complex system** in which all the parts and subsystems constantly interact. Global problems such as persistent poverty and climate change should be viewed from this perspective and solutions and policy interventions should be sought that are beneficial for the system as a whole.
2. Our top priorities are to further a global transition to sustainable patterns of living and development and the creation of sustainable global economies that can **eradicate extreme poverty** and improve the quality of life for all.
3. Unsustainable patterns of production and consumption are leading to severe pressure on **planetary boundaries**. These pressures must be reduced to avoid further damage to planetary systems and ensure critical tipping points are not reached.
4. Everyone contributes, as consumers and producers to the global economy. **Global, national, and regional solutions** are needed to tackle systemic problems facing the world's natural systems and their interactions with the global human economy.
5. New goals must understand **country-specific contexts** and discover appropriate targets that contribute to the overarching goal of eradicating poverty while transitioning to more sustainable, resilient economies that avoid unacceptable pressure on planetary boundaries.
6. Permanent, long-term solutions to the world's problems demand inter-sectoral and trans-sectoral approaches that are **optimal for the system as a whole**, not simply a single sector.
7. Tackling cross-sectoral issues require **non-traditional governance structures**. New structures can encourage cooperation between governmental departments at every level, and catalyze partnerships with business and civil society.

Recommendations

As the Open Working Group finishes its recommendations for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), its members and chairs should consider the following broad needs:

1. The SDGs are an opportunity to articulate the challenges of sustainable development in a set of goals, targets and indicators that are specific, universal and flexible and capable of being achieved by 2030.
2. The SDGs must catalyze sustainable development in every country, part of society and sector of the economy by reanimating institutional structures and initiatives at every governance level to advance human well-being.
3. The SDGs must express a balanced determination to achieve both poverty eradication and other development objectives, and to move decisively towards more equitable and sustainable patterns of consumption and production.
4. The SDGs must push national and supranational entities to re-design institutional arrangements within their organizational structure that discourage silo thinking and encourage cross-sector collaboration and partnerships with business and other stakeholders.
5. The SDGs must catalyze the development of policy, guidelines and regulations within the public and private sectors that foster and nurture human well-being.
6. The SDGs must highlight the added value of incorporating sustainability into the poverty reduction agenda rather than casting sustainability as a necessary but detrimental inclusion. Examples of this approach include the idea of irreversible poverty eradication and of maximizing the sustainable yield from the oceans for human nutrition.

The SDGs should be seen as a catalyst for a global drive to eliminate poverty and advance sustainable development and as such, policy-makers should keep in mind long-term changes that must occur in different sectors and parts of society.

7. The business community must improve integrated resource management capabilities, develop more effective multi-sector collaborations, create new legal structures and more equitable pricing structures. They must look beyond the risks associated with resource mismanagement to the opportunities created by proper resource management.

Furthermore, the business community must improve its communication with policy, advocacy and academic communities to create a dialogue for understanding shared goals and experiences and a common language for discussing policies. This requires the business community to be engaged as an active partner in the global agenda-setting process.

8. The scientific community must increase interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research that grounds new policy approaches in robust science, clearly defines what is and is not a cross-cutting issue, and provides policy makers with research and tools that match their needs.
9. Governments must create the proper incentives and mitigate risks as to facilitate the flow of the 20 to 30 trillion dollars of sidelined private capital into sustainable development projects by funding pilot projects, offering loan guarantees, and extending long-term purchase orders to new green projects.
10. Social entrepreneurs need a funding platform for innovative projects that advance integrated action on cross-sector issues. Such a platform should be paired with experienced practitioners to serve as mentors for new proposals.
11. Sustainable cities depend on sustainable country sides and a greater focus must be placed not just on issue linkages but also on spatial linkages. Urban and rural landscapes are inextricably linked and policy-making must reflect this link.
12. Ensuring global food security and reducing rural poverty requires a prioritization of the 500 million small-holder farmers worldwide through disseminating innovations and catalyzing affordable and efficient irrigation as to not exceed limited water resources.

Cross-Sector Progress in Action

Within the UN there exists precedent for a cross-sectoral approach. The UN Secretary General's "Sustainable Energy for All" initiative links improvements in energy access with the reduction of carbon emissions. The UN should work to build on this model and apply cross-sectoral approaches to a range of initiatives moving forward.

The Nexus approach, a cross-sector, integrative approach, is a valuable strategic tool for operationalizing the goals and targets of the SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda and we urge its inclusion into the decision and policy making process moving forward.