

## Conceptualizing a Set of Sustainable Development Goals - A Special Event of the Second Committee of the UN General Assembly

**Comments made on October 16, 2012 by Ed Barry, on behalf of the NGO major group (abbreviated at the request of the chair):**

**About Natural Resource Sustainability:** *We applaud Oxfam's efforts to communicate a 'safe operating space' for humanity, and SEI's work on planetary boundaries. These descriptive frameworks are needed to help build awareness about the relationship between human activity and resource limitations. However, we must go beyond these conceptual frameworks and also think about the prescriptive framework. How do we keep humanity in a safe operating space? And how can we continue with an aggressive global human development agenda when we are already exceeding planetary boundaries?*

*In response to these questions, we believe that one or more of the sustainable development goals must address the question; are we living within our natural resource means? Societies at all levels - local, national, and global – must evaluate whether or not they have sufficient resources to support the long-term well-being of their people.*

**Importance of Civil Society involvement:** *Civil society stands ready to support you in your task of creating truly sustainable development goals. We will be happy to provide specific policy recommendations and proven pathways to implementation at the ground level. We support the creation of a Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group to work with the Open Working Group on SDGs as they design an effective institutional framework for sustainable development at all levels.*

*Thank you.*

### Unabbreviated version/prepared intervention:

1. **The importance of the SDGs:** The stakes are high. The SDGs, like the MDGs, will serve as an international “rallying point” for investments in developing countries. They will facilitate an international focus on the most important human development objectives needed throughout the world, especially for developing nations. They can also help all nations to curb unsustainable consumption and production, accelerate the transition to renewable energy, and achieve poverty reduction. For better or worse, they will “set the bar” for local, national and global sustainability. Civil society stands ready to fully support your efforts, and the efforts of all peoples of the world, to design and promulgate meaningful SDGs.
2. **We must keep the “S” in the SDGs:** With 7 billion people on the planet and rising levels of affluence, we are already exceeding nature's limits. Climate change, peak oil, water scarcity, rising food prices, and biodiversity loss are all signs that we are exceeding planetary boundaries. In fact, scientists warn that by 2030, we may need two Earths to sustain our living standards. Alas, we do not have two Earths. Truly sustainable economic and human development requires that we live **within** our ecological means. As just one example, the transformation of agriculture

and food systems to produce enough nutritious food, is all about staying within the limits of natural resources.

But how do we actually manage development in a truly sustainable manner? The answer lies in participatory **natural resource** planning and accountability. Our global human development programs - and the future health and well-being of human societies – require adequate resources and healthy bio-systems. Indeed, healthy and well managed resource systems provide the very foundation for all present and future well-being. Therefore, as we design and promulgate the SDGs for the benefit of humanity, it is critically important that we include metrics and goals that pertain to the **sufficiency** of the natural resources needed to support our global development vision. Yes, the world must aggressively move forward with an inclusive human development agenda. However, as we do this, we must always keep a watchful and realistic eye on the resources needed to accomplish this agenda. The SDGs must include the principle of resource sufficiency and accountability.

- 3. Importance of Civil Society involvement:** Civil society stands ready to support you in your task of creating truly sustainable development goals. We will be happy to provide specific policy recommendations and proven pathways to implementation at the ground level. To be effective in such support, civil society must be adequately engaged as advisors in all phases of policy development, from working with Member States and the Secretariat in preparations for national debate, to local policy adoption, mobilization and implementation. Robust engagement of expert knowledge across sectors is necessary and manageable, as evidenced in the history of civil society engagement in a variety of UN processes including the Major Groups system and other civil society mechanisms. We support the creation of a Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group to work with the Open Working Group on SDGs as they design an effective institutional framework for sustainable development at all levels.

Additional text in specific reference to Oxfam's "Donut" model: We applaud Oxfam's efforts to develop a 'safe operating space' for humanity, and SEI's work on planetary boundaries. These descriptive frameworks are needed to help build awareness about the relationship between human activity and resource limitations. However, we must go beyond these conceptual frameworks and also think about the prescriptive framework. How do we ensure that humanity is in a safe operating space? And how can we advance the human development agenda when we are already exceeding planetary boundaries?

In response to these questions, we believe that the sustainable development goals must first determine whether we are living within our natural resource means? Societies at all levels - local, national, and global – must evaluate whether or not they have sufficient resources to support the long-term well-being of their people.

This need to measure sustainability, which we call resource sufficiency evaluation and reporting, is conceptually quite straight-forward. Proven methodologies, such as the ecological footprint and life-cycle analysis can be used to produce national resource 'balance sheets' that tell us if our total and forecasted natural resource demands are within the total quantity of resources available to us. This type of resource 'balance sheet' accountability tells us if we are operating within bio-physical limits. Resource sufficiency metrics would also give policymakers a clearer understanding of what's required to live within those limits and which investments are most critically needed.