

A New Architecture for a New Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

*A proposal from the Natural Resources Defense Council to the
UN Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals*

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a once-in-a-generation opportunity to catalyze the transformative changes needed to end extreme poverty, improve human well-being, and protect our shared planetary home. To meet these challenges in a world that has changed dramatically since the inception of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) puts forward this proposal to the United Nations Open Working Group on SDGs for a new architecture for a new global partnership. This framework will **drive the action and accountability that is essential to securing a sustainable future. The structure will link the SDGs to national plans and objectives and to commitments to action.**

The High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (HLP) called for the “a new global partnership” that starts with a recognition of our common humanity. It also calls for the mobilization of all stakeholders — including governments at all levels, the private sector, and civil society — to act in pursuit of the new global goals. The HLP recognizes the reality that **“global problems can best be solved by thousands, even millions, of people working together.”** A new global partnership is essential to generate the will to move from promises to performance, from good intentions to actual improvements on the ground.

But in order to build such a **“culture of implementation”** for the SDGs, we need a new architecture for this new global partnership. Whatever goals and targets are agreed upon, equally as important will be the structures that enable their full implementation and accountability.

NRDC is proposing the concept of a “wired dome” as the architecture for a new global partnership. At the top of the dome are the SDGs and their associated targets. The SDGs should be action-oriented, with targets based on **SMART** (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Resource-based, Time-bound) criteria.

The next level of the dome consists of national plans and objectives. **National governments must play a central role in guiding and securing the implementation of the SDGs.** In a mutually reinforcing relationship, the targets are informed by the national plans and objectives, just as the national plans and objectives should be based on achieving the targets.

The foundational layer of the dome is a **constellation of commitments to action**, including multi-stakeholder partnerships, initiatives, action networks, clubs, coalitions, and alliances — including ODA projects — that involve governments at all levels, business, and civil society. All layers of the dome are “wired” to represent the connectivity between goals, national plans, and commitments to action. This reflects the myriad connections between the various actors and the potential to use information technologies to ensure accountability. The new global partnership consists of the aggregation and integration of actions on each of the SDGs from all stakeholders at every level.



The "wired dome" architecture for action on the SDGs. See full visualization of the new architecture here: <http://bit.ly/19dnHLLd>

The HLP also recognizes the need for a new architecture by recommending **goal- or sector-specific global partnerships should be a central part of the new development agenda**. Thematic global partnerships are more flexible structures that can adapt and respond to the complex challenges of an interconnected world. One example is the Secretary-General’s Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All) initiative. SE4All is a multi-stakeholder partnership among governments, the private sector, and civil society to mobilize commitments to action in support of global energy objectives. The SE4All platform is **supported by regional and thematic hubs that allow all stakeholders to register commitments to action**, while ensuring progress is tracked and aggregated through robust accountability and transparency mechanisms.

The HLP calls for a “**data revolution**” that will be crucial to usher in an “**accountability revolution**” for strengthened monitoring of progress toward commitments by all partners. Thus, the new architecture should ensure accountability by harnessing data and technology. **Regularly updated registries of commitments to action** can help ensure accountability and monitor delivery gaps. Registries should be thematically clustered around the goals to provide aggregated real-time monitoring of results in order to measure progress toward SMART targets and indicators under each SDG. The new standard for recognition should be the *fulfillment* — not the *announcement* — of specific commitments to action.

For more than a decade, NRDC has highlighted the need to bridge the **implementation gap**. The current approach to setting global goals simply has not delivered the results our world needs. Perhaps most immediately relevant is the experience with the MDGs where many of the targets remain unmet. The most significant shortcomings of the MDGs are 1) the lack of explicit linkages between the visionary goals and their means of implementation and 2) the dearth of mechanisms to measure progress and ensure accountability.

In the run up to the Rio+20 Conference, NRDC created the “Cloud of Commitments” platform to aggregate and highlight the myriad non-globally-negotiated promises toward global goals made at Rio+20. Hundreds of commitments from Presidents, Prime Ministers, Mayors, CEOs, and other leaders were made at Rio+20 through various platforms. These promises to take specific actions should be recognized as a **new “means of implementation.”** The UN now has a registry of some 1,400 commitments made at Rio+20 and elsewhere valued at more than \$640 billion.

In November 2013, NRDC co-organized the *Rio+20 to 2015* conference at Yale University to explore this new world of commitments and its relationship to the two critical UN processes culminating in 2015: the SDGs and the next climate agreement. More than 180 officials, academics, practitioners, and students from 30 countries began a conversation on the need to design a new structure to drive action and accountability on sustainable development. We look forward to continuing and intensifying this discussion with governments and all stakeholders at the United Nations in the critical next two years for the post-2015 development agenda.



About NRDC

The Natural Resources Defense Council is a nonprofit environmental advocacy organization with more than 1.4 million members and online activists. NRDC’s staff of attorneys, scientists, and specialists address the full range of global sustainability challenges. Based in the U.S., NRDC has an office in Beijing and works with partners in India, Latin America, and elsewhere worldwide. NRDC has a long history of engagement with the United Nations, starting with the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment.

Jacob Scherr, jscherr@nrdc.org, John Romano, jromano@nrdc.org, Brendan Guy, bguy@nrdc.org