



Library Note

Sustainable Development Goals: Parliamentary Perspectives

This Library Note has been prepared in advance of the debate in the House of Lords on 17 September 2015:

[...] that this House takes note of the forthcoming summit on sustainable development goals in September and Her Majesty's Government's objectives at that summit.

The United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda will be held from 25 to 27 September 2015 in New York, as a high-level plenary meeting of the UN General Assembly. At this summit, UN member states are expected to agree the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a framework of 17 goals and 169 targets covering both human development and environmental sustainability, all based on the fundamental principle of "leave no one behind". The SDGs are intended to cover the period until 2030. The international community began work several years ago on developing a new framework to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), most of which had a target deadline of 2015. From September 2014, work on the 'post-2015 development agenda' was brought together with a separate strand of work begun under the Rio+20 process to draw up a set of sustainable development goals. The SDGs to be agreed at the September summit are the culmination of both of these strands of work.

The House of Commons Library briefing on [The Sustainable Development Goals and the Post-2015 Development Agenda](#), published on 4 September 2015, provides information about the international negotiating process leading up to the SDGs and an analysis of the UK Government's policy. (Similar ground is covered in the House of Lords Library Note on [Global Development Goals in 2015](#), published in December 2014, about the earlier stages of the negotiating process.) The purpose of this Library Note is to complement that briefing by providing further information on parliamentary perspectives, highlighting issues which have attracted attention during select committee inquiries, debates and parliamentary questions over recent months. These include:

- Are 17 targets and 169 goals so numerous as to be unworkable?
- Should universal health coverage be prioritised in the standalone goal on health, or be mentioned in the underlying health targets?
- Should there be a standalone goal on climate change, and should specific targets on climate change be included in the SDGs?
- How can the UK implement and monitor the new SDGs?

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I. Government Priorities

In October 2014, the Department for International Development (DfID) outlined the Government's five key priorities for the goals in the post-2015 framework as:

- a) A simple, inspiring, relevant framework centred on poverty eradication.
- b) A framework that finishes the job on the Millennium Development Goals.
- c) The integration of environmental sustainability across the goals, and targets that ensure visibility for climate change.
- d) A strong, standalone goal on gender equality.
- e) A goal on the critical issues left out by the MDGs: peace, good governance and economic development.¹

Justine Greening, the Secretary of State for International Development, has said that throughout the process, the UK has “pushed for the highest possible level of ambition” and been “consistent in our drive for member states to agree an inspiring and workable agenda centred on the eradication of extreme poverty, with sustainable development at its core”.² She maintained that the UK had been “instrumental” in forging the outcome of the OWG document, noting that the proposed goals reflected a “high level of ambition” and “rightly devote significant attention to climate change and environmental sustainability”.³

In June 2015, in answer to a parliamentary question about the Government's priorities during what remained of the negotiation period, Ms Greening said that: “The UK wants an inspiring agenda that eradicates extreme poverty through sustainable development by 2030, ensuring that no one is left behind. There must be strong language on finishing the Millennium Development Goals, on gender equality, and on peace, governance, and the rule of law”.⁴

In a debate in the House of Lords prior to the summer recess, Baroness Verma, Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Department for International Development, emphasised the UK's priorities for the next 15 years:

[...] we must eradicate the scourge of extreme poverty and put the world on a pathway to sustainable development. We must finish the job of the MDGs, but also go beyond them to focus on the quality of service such as education, rather than just on access to education. We have to tackle climate change and environmental degradation as an integral part of our work on poverty eradication and global prosperity.⁵

Echoing Ms Greening's points about the UK's negotiating priorities, Baroness Verma explained after the debate that the principle of “leaving no one behind” was “one of the most important aspects” of the new framework, “whereby no target will be considered met unless met by all economic and social groups”.⁶ She said that this “powerful and progressive statement of intent” had been “a major priority for the UK in UN negotiations”. She also stated that the Government was “especially pleased” that Goal 16 (Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and

¹ House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, [Written Evidence submitted by the Department for International Development](#), 15 October 2014.

² HC *Hansard*, 28 January 2015, [col 936](#).

³ *ibid.*

⁴ House of Commons, Written Question: Developing Countries—Sustainable Development, 3 June 2015, [900073](#).

⁵ HL *Hansard*, 16 June 2015, [col 1150](#).

⁶ Letter from Baroness Verma to Lord McConnell and others, 29 June 2015, [DEP2015-0539](#).

inclusive institutions at all levels) was an integral part of the framework, which would “advance the promotion and protection [of] human rights globally”.⁷ Baroness Verma considered the existing goal on gender equality (Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) to be “good”, and said that the UK would “continue to argue for all aspects of the framework to respond effectively to gender issues through the remaining negotiations”.⁸

The Labour Party has been broadly supportive of the Government’s agenda but has pressed the Government to go further. Speaking in January 2015, Anas Sarwar, the then Shadow Minister for International Development, expressed criticism of “the force of [the Government’s] advocacy and leadership”.⁹ He called for the Government to be “drivers, not passengers” in the negotiations, and for the new SDGs to “go faster to eliminate extreme poverty and focus on tackling inequality”. In July 2015, Lord Collins of Highbury, the Shadow Spokesman on International Development, paid tribute to the work of the previous Government in “helping change global opinion on the issue of gender based violence”, but called for the new Conservative government to “match [Labour’s] ambition” in making sure that “tackling inequality and ensuring the attainment of human rights, including the fundamental rights of women and girls, remain at the heart of these agreements, as does, of course, combating climate change”.¹⁰

2. Number of Goals

In July 2014, an intergovernmental Open Working Group (OWG), established by the UN Rio+20 Conference, published a proposed set of sustainable development goals, which contained 17 main goals and 169 underpinning targets.¹¹ The UN General Assembly agreed in September 2014 that these proposals would be the “main basis” for the forthcoming intergovernmental negotiation process.¹² A ‘zero draft’ of the text of outcome document to be adopted formally by the UN at the September 2015 summit was published in early June 2015.¹³ Following further drafting changes during intergovernmental negotiations in July, at the beginning of August 2015, a ‘finalised’ draft text was informally agreed at a plenary intergovernmental negotiating session; this draft outcome document is the text that will be considered by Heads of State and Government at the summit in September.¹⁴ The title of the draft outcome document is “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. It sets out the wider context and, like the OWG’s original proposals, it contains 17 goals and 169 targets, although the wording of some of the targets has been amended since the OWG first put them forward last year.¹⁵

The Government has expressed concerns that 17 goals is too many. Speaking at a side event at the UN General Assembly in September 2014, David Cameron, the Prime Minister, said that, while he appreciated the work of the OWG, there were “too many [goals] to communicate

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ HC *Hansard*, 28 January 2015, [col 965](#).

¹⁰ HL *Hansard*, 16 June 2015, [cols 1148–9](#).

¹¹ UN, [Open Working Group Proposal for Sustainable Development Goals](#), July 2014.

¹² UN General Assembly Resolution 68/309, [Report of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals Established Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 66/288](#), A/RES/68/309, adopted 10 September 2014.

¹³ UN, [‘Zero Draft: Outcome Document to Adopt Post-2015 Development Agenda’](#), 3 June 2015.

¹⁴ International Institute for Sustainable Development, [‘UN Finalizes 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’](#), 2 August 2015.

¹⁵ UN General Assembly, [Draft Outcome Document of the United Nations Summit for the Adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda](#), 12 August 2015, A/69/L.85.

effectively”, with “a real danger they will end up on a bookshelf, gathering dust”.¹⁶ Mr Cameron called for not more than twelve goals, preferably ten. Twelve was the number of illustrative goals in the 2013 report of the High Level Panel set up by UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon to advise on the post-2015 development agenda, which Mr Cameron co-chaired.¹⁷

While giving evidence to the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee in October 2014, Justine Greening also voiced concerns that “if everything is a priority, then nothing gets prioritised at the end of the day”.¹⁸ Ms Greening praised the simplicity of the MDGs, concluding they owed much of their success to the fact that they were “very simple, they were extremely compelling, and they were very clear cut in terms of the targets”.¹⁹ The limited number of targets meant that countries could not simply cherry-pick a few, and this had “channelled efforts, investment and focus in a way that has been very positive”. However, she made no specific suggestions as to which of the OWG’s 17 goals might be dispensed with.²⁰ The Environmental Audit Committee concluded in its report in December 2014 that to reduce the number of goals “would inevitably be to omit key aspects of the sustainable development framework after 2015, potentially including those relating to environmental sustainability” and that this would be “a mistake”.²¹ The Committee urged the Government to respect “the wider international consensus established around the 17 Open Working Group goals”, arguing that to do otherwise “risks creating unnecessary divisions between countries when [the Government] should be seeking to build support for ambitious action”.²²

Conversely, at the start of 2015, Sir Malcolm Bruce (Liberal Democrat), the then Chair of the House of Commons International Development Committee, described the 17 goals and 169 targets as “clearly unmanageable”.²³ He felt they needed to be “boiled down to something that people can work with and remember”, and suggested that the six essential elements identified by Ban Ki Moon—dignity, people, prosperity, planet, justice and partnership—could provide a way forward. In a report published in December 2014, the UN Secretary General suggested that the 17 goals could be maintained but “rearrange[d] [...] in a focused and concise manner that enables the necessary global awareness and implementation at the country level”.²⁴

In the Government’s response to the Environmental Audit Committee report, published in February 2015, DFID restated its support for the “breadth of the content” of the goals proposed by the OWG, but argued that “a framework of 17 goals and 169 targets is not implementable for either the UK or developing countries”.²⁵ DFID said that “as intergovernmental negotiations progress through 2015 the UK will continue arguing for a framework that is workable and implemented by all member states”.

¹⁶ Liz Ford, [‘UN Begins Talks on SDGs, “Carrying the Hopes of Millions”](#)’, *Guardian*, 24 September 2014.

¹⁷ High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, [A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development](#), May 2013.

¹⁸ House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, [Oral Evidence: Sustainable Development Goals](#), 29 October 2014, HC 452 of session 2014–15, Q3.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, Q13.

²⁰ *ibid.*, Q6.

²¹ House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, [Connected World: Agreeing Ambitious Sustainable Development Goals in 2015](#), 15 December 2014, HC 452 of session 2014–15, p 35.

²² *ibid.*

²³ HC *Hansard*, 28 January 2015, [col 946](#).

²⁴ UN Secretary General, [The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet](#), 4 December 2014, p 19.

²⁵ House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, [Connected World: Agreeing Ambitious Sustainable Development Goals in 2015: Government Response](#), 16 February 2015, HC 1067 of session 2014–15, p 6.

As the EU has shared competence for development and humanitarian aid, it is leading negotiations on the SDGs on behalf of all its member states.²⁶ Desmond Swayne, Minister of State at DFID, explained in March 2015 that France and Germany were “disinclined” to re-open the issue of the number of goals in the way the UK wanted, as they questioned “whether it is worth expending their political capital on”.²⁷ He acknowledged there was a risk that in “an attempt to get a narrowed and honed-down version”, the UK might lose “the issues most important to us, such as governance and rule of law” which “we went to the wire to get [...] into the original mix”.

At the beginning of June 2015, Justine Greening maintained “that a short set of goals and targets [...] would be ideal”, but said the UK “recognise[d] the strong consensus among UN member states to maintain the sustainable development goals and targets [...] in their current form”.²⁸ Grant Shapps, Minister of State at DFID, speaking in mid-June 2015, said that the zero base document—the first draft of the outcome document for the September summit—“start[ed] to get to grips” with the “rather unwieldy” number of goals and targets by coming up with nine principles, which he thought would “be easier for people to understand”.²⁹ (The nine principles listed in the preamble in the zero draft have been replaced in the latest draft by five headings identified as “areas of critical importance”: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership—similar but not identical to Ban Ki Moon’s six essential elements.³⁰) Mr Shapps acknowledged that “we are where we are with this process”, and rather than trying to “go back to square one and start again”, it was “important that we push forward”. Patrick Grady, the SNP Spokesperson on International Development, suggested that “the time has passed for getting into a debate about the number of goals and so on”, but rather “the opportunity now is to make the language as robust as possible” and to “focus on collecting data and monitoring the impact of the SDGs”.³¹

The House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee expressed concerns in July 2015 over whether “replacing eight MDGs and 21 targets with 17 SDGs and 169 targets will stretch development budgets too far and not provide value for money”.³² It argued that “one potential side effect of this abundant new list of targets [is] to reduce the priority of issues like poverty, nutrition and education, which were the backbone of the previous MDGs”. It also identified the “extent of the finances needed in order to achieve such a long list of targets” as another matter for concern.

3. Universal Health Coverage

There have been some calls within Parliament for the Government to negotiate changes to the goals on health and climate change. In January 2015, Mary Creagh, the Shadow Secretary of State for International Development, moved a motion in the House of Commons regretting “that this Government has failed to support standalone sustainable development goals on health

²⁶ House of Commons, Written Question: Developing Countries—Sustainable Development, 16 January 2015, [220522](#).

²⁷ House of Commons European Committee B, 11 March 2015, [cols 5-6](#).

²⁸ House of Commons, Written Question: Developing Countries—Sustainable Development, 2 June 2015, [10](#).

²⁹ HC Hansard, 16 June 2015, [col 78WH](#).

³⁰ UN General Assembly, [Draft Outcome Document of the United Nations Summit for the Adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda](#), 12 August 2015, A/69/L.85.

³¹ HC Hansard, 16 June 2015, [col 80WH](#).

³² House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee, [First Report of Session 2015–16](#), 21 July 2015, HC 342-I of session 2015–16, para 2.9.

and climate change”.³³ She described universal health coverage, human rights and climate change as “three vital areas that Labour would prioritise to tackle inequality”.³⁴ Anas Sarwar, the then Shadow Minister for International Development, specified that Labour supported a standalone goal on universal health coverage, as the party believed that access to healthcare “should be a right, not a privilege”.³⁵

Goal 3 calls on UN members to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”. One of the associated targets, target 3.8, is to “achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all”.³⁶ The wording for this goal and target are unchanged since the OWG’s original proposal published in July 2014.³⁷ The House of Commons International Development Committee has noted that “much of the debate about the post-2015 development goals [...] focuses on whether universal health coverage [UHC], that everyone who needs health services is able to get them without incurring financial hardship, should be a headline priority”.³⁸ The Committee noted arguments for and against prioritising universal health coverage:

We heard concerns about targeting UHC, including that by encompassing entire populations it could lead to reduced focus on the poorest and most vulnerable, that it is a moving target as quality standards or population characteristics change, that it is too distant a prospect in some countries, and that it could lead to an over-emphasis on inefficient and ineffective insurance schemes. However, we were also told that aiming for universal health coverage would necessitate HSS [health system strengthening], as it was impossible to achieve without an effective health system and a long-term, cross-sector approach. A UHC target could be a “critical mechanism for improving health system performance”. DFID concurred with this assessment, stating both that UHC would not be attained without strong health systems and that the NHS gave the UK a comparative advantage in working towards its achievement.³⁹

Taking these arguments into account, the Committee recommended that “DFID continue to press for universal health coverage as a prominent feature of a single post-2015 development goal for health”.⁴⁰

The Government’s position is that the headline goal should be ‘outcome-based’ (eg “ensure healthy lives”), rather than set out the means of achieving this. Lynne Featherstone (Liberal Democrat), the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development, explained to the International Development Committee that:

[...] while we absolutely support universal health coverage, we are not sure that having that as a goal would be the best way to get to universal health coverage. We think that outcome-driven has been proved by the last MDGs to be more of a driving force than a

³³ HC *Hansard*, 28 January 2015, [col 925](#). The motion was defeated by 290 votes to 200 (ibid, [col 970](#)).

³⁴ ibid, [col 926](#).

³⁵ ibid, [col 966](#).

³⁶ UN General Assembly, [Draft Outcome Document of the United Nations Summit for the Adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda](#), 12 August 2015, A/69/L.85.

³⁷ UN, [Open Working Group Proposal for Sustainable Development Goals](#), July 2014.

³⁸ House of Commons International Development Committee, [Strengthening Health Systems in Developing Countries](#), 12 September 2014, HC 246 of session 2014–15, p 32.

³⁹ ibid, p 33.

⁴⁰ ibid.

goal that does not demand an outcome focus. I do not think there is a difference in the ambition; there is a difference in how we think we should get there.⁴¹

DFID noted in its response to the Committee's report that: "The UK has supported the inclusion of a universal health coverage target under an outcome-focused post-2015 health goal. It will continue to do so as discussions progress".⁴² During recent parliamentary proceedings, the Labour Party has continued to question the Government on whether it would support the inclusion of universal health coverage in the standalone goal on health during negotiations.⁴³ The Government has continued to back the inclusion of universal health coverage as an underlying target. Justine Greening told the House of Commons in June 2015 that the UK was a "strong advocate" of "universal health coverage that truly makes a difference to people and puts them in a position to be able to play a role in helping to develop their country".⁴⁴ Baroness Verma said the Government "recognise[d] universal health coverage as an essential means of ensuring effective health outcomes" and was "pleased to see its inclusion as a target".⁴⁵

4. Climate Change

During the course of the negotiation process, there have been debates as to whether there should be a standalone goal on climate change, or whether climate change should be integrated as a cross-cutting theme throughout the framework. Goal 13 is to "Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts", with the proviso that UN member states acknowledge that "the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC] is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change".⁴⁶ A conference of the parties to the UNFCCC is scheduled to take place in Paris in December 2015, at which it is hoped to "achieve a new international agreement on the climate, applicable to all countries, with the aim of keeping global warming below 2°C".⁴⁷ The final draft text of the outcome document for the SDG summit states:

We are determined to address decisively the threat posed by climate change and environmental degradation. The global nature of climate change calls for the widest possible international cooperation aimed at accelerating the reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions and addressing adaptation to the adverse impacts of climate change. We note with grave concern the significant gap between the aggregate effect of parties' mitigation pledges in terms of global annual emissions of greenhouse gases by 2020 and aggregate emission pathways consistent with having a likely chance of holding the increase in global average temperature below 2°C or 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.⁴⁸

Neither goal 13 nor its underlying targets set specific emissions targets or temperature reductions for countries to achieve.

⁴¹ House of Commons International Development Committee, [Oral Evidence: Health Systems Strengthening](#), 10 July 2014, HC 948 of session 2014–15, Q145.

⁴² House of Commons International Development Committee, [Strengthening Health Systems in Developing Countries: Government Response](#), 21 November 2014, HC 816 of session 2014–15, p 14.

⁴³ HC *Hansard*, 3 June 2015, [col 575](#); HC *Hansard*, 16 June 2015, [col 76WH](#); HL *Hansard*, 16 June 2015, [col 1148](#).

⁴⁴ HC *Hansard*, 3 June 2015, [col 576](#).

⁴⁵ HL *Hansard*, 16 June 2015, [col 1152](#).

⁴⁶ UN General Assembly, [Draft Outcome Document of the United Nations Summit for the Adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda](#), 12 August 2015, A/69/L.85.

⁴⁷ Paris 2015 UN Climate Change Conference website, '[What is COP21/CMPI 1?](#)', accessed 7 September 2015.

⁴⁸ UN General Assembly, [Draft Outcome Document of the United Nations Summit for the Adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda](#), 12 August 2015, A/69/L.85, para 31.

The House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee noted in its report that “the similar timing of the SDG and climate change negotiations presents an important opportunity to embed climate change thinking throughout the SDGs—to avoid development that exacerbates climate change while also building decarbonisation and adaptation into development”.⁴⁹ The Committee encouraged the Government to “publically support a separate climate change goal in the SDGs given the importance of reaching an ambitious global climate change agreement in Paris”. However, it also alleged that the Government was “pursuing contradictory policies by effectively giving subsidies for fossil fuels” while at the same time “stating a commitment to ambitious action on climate change”.

The Government rejected this charge, stating in its response to the Committee report that “the UK does not subsidise carbon intensive energy sources” and that “it should be clear that the UK does not have any fossil fuel subsidies”.⁵⁰ The Government set out its support for the “visible integration of climate and environment across the post-2015 framework”. It called for the inclusion in the framework of measures such as: “ambitious, climate-resilient goals and targets on areas such as energy, water, agriculture, oceans, deforestation, disaster resilience, natural resource management, and others as relevant; the ‘below 2 degrees’ objective; and a strong framing narrative on the importance of addressing climate change”. However, the Government also cautioned that the post-2015 development framework ought to “complement and support—but not duplicate” international climate change negotiations already underway through the UNFCCC.

As noted above, a motion moved by Mary Creagh, the Shadow International Development Secretary, in January 2015 criticised the Government for its lack of support for the standalone goal on climate change.⁵¹ In that debate, Justine Greening maintained that climate change was “too complex an issue to belong in just one goal; as we have said repeatedly, it needs to be interwoven or mainstreamed throughout the entire post-2015 framework”.⁵² However, she also noted that the UK had “clear and ambitious” objectives for the Paris climate change conference, namely “an outcome that delivers the ultimate goal of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which is to avoid dangerous climate change temperature increase to no more than 2°C above pre-industrial levels”, and that the UK was “one of the few countries arguing for this to be explicit in the SDG framework”.⁵³

Desmond Swayne, Minister of State at DFID, later clarified that the Government had “no agenda” to get rid of the existing goal on climate change in the framework.⁵⁴ However, he maintained there was a debate to be had over whether it was better to “have a specific goal or inculcate in all the goals and targets a climate element”—he noted, for example, that DFID “smart rules” obliged sustainability and climate change to be built into every project.

Labour have continued to argue for the language on climate change to be strengthened. In a House of Commons debate in June 2015, Gavin Shuker, Shadow Minister for International Development, said his party “remain[ed] concerned that [...] the zero draft of the outcome document is still unambitious on [the climate change] agenda, allowing goal 13 to remain

⁴⁹ House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, [Connected World: Agreeing Ambitious Sustainable Development Goals in 2015](#), 15 December 2014, HC 452 of session 2014–15, p 19.

⁵⁰ House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, [Connected World: Agreeing Ambitious Sustainable Development Goals in 2015: Government Response](#), 16 February 2015, HC 1067 of session 2014–15, p 3.

⁵¹ HC *Hansard*, 28 January 2015, [col 925](#). The motion was defeated by 290 votes to 200 (ibid, [col 970](#)).

⁵² ibid, [col 940](#).

⁵³ ibid, [cols 937-8](#).

⁵⁴ House of Commons European Committee B, 11 March 2015, [col 11](#).

essentially a holding text for an agreement that has not yet happened, and whose start date and implementation is five years from now”.⁵⁵ He urged the Government to “ensure in September that climate change remains a standalone goal in the post-2015 SDGs, with a 2° global temperature rise embedded in the language of the goal”. Patrick Grady, the SNP Spokesperson on International Development, also called for the language on climate change in the SDGs to be “as robust as possible”.⁵⁶ In a debate in the Lords on the same day, Lord Collins of Highbury, Shadow Spokesman on International Development, questioned whether a framework without a standalone goal on climate change could “undermine the potential of the entire agenda”, given the “clear links between climate change, inequality, poverty and economic development”.⁵⁷ Baroness Verma agreed that “development and tackling climate change are two sides of the coin”, but she stated the Government’s belief that this was already “well reflected in the post-2015 agenda”.⁵⁸

5. Implementation and Monitoring

The intention is for the SDGs to be universal—in the words of a UN stakeholder forum report, “reflect[ing] the moral principles that no-one and no country should be left behind, and that everyone and every country should be regarded as having a common responsibility for playing their part in delivering the global vision”.⁵⁹ The report went on to state that “all of the goals have therefore been conceived as applying both as ambitions and as challenges to all countries”. The House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee observed in its report at the end of 2014 that in its view, the Government had given “much less thought” to the domestic implications of the new goals than to working internationally and that the Government seemed “readier to consider goals for other countries than for itself”.⁶⁰

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) informed the Committee that it was “already looking at how the UK might report and monitor the SDGs from 2016”.⁶¹ The ONS planned to look at aligning the UK’s existing sustainable development indicators with the SDGs when they were finalised.⁶² DFID anticipated that in future it would assess its policies and programmes against the delivery of the post-2015 goals and targets.⁶³ Desmond Swayne told the House of Commons in March 2015 that “even now we are thinking about implementation”.⁶⁴ He said that the question of “how measurable, enforceable and mandatory 169 targets will be” was “causing concern to the whole Government”.

Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale (Labour) drew attention to the monitoring issue again during a Lords debate on the SDGs in June 2015. He called for independent monitoring of the implementation process, parliamentary monitoring of the actions of Governments around the world and the involvement of “people themselves [...] in monitoring their experience of the

⁵⁵ HC *Hansard*, 16 June 2015, [col 76WH](#).

⁵⁶ *ibid*, [col 80WH](#).

⁵⁷ HL *Hansard*, 16 June 2015, [col 1148](#).

⁵⁸ Letter from Baroness Verma to Lord McConnell and others, 29 June 2015, [DEP2015-0539](#).

⁵⁹ Stakeholder Forum, [Universal Sustainable Development Goals: Understand the Transformational Challenge for Developed Countries](#), May 2015, p 2.

⁶⁰ House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, [Connected World: Agreeing Ambitious Sustainable Development Goals in 2015](#), 15 December 2014, HC 452 of session 2014–15, p 37.

⁶¹ *ibid*, p 46.

⁶² The ONS Sustainable Development Indicators are available on the [ONS website](#).

⁶³ House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, [Connected World: Agreeing Ambitious Sustainable Development Goals in 2015](#), 15 December 2014, HC 452 of session 2014–15, p 37.

⁶⁴ House of Commons European Committee B, 11 March 2015, [col 7](#).

implementation of those development goals if they are to be successful and truly sustainable”.⁶⁵ Responding for the Government, Baroness Verma agreed with these points and noted that the Government wanted a UN global review mechanism that was “robust” as well as “open and transparent”, coupling national accountability with the engagement of parliaments and citizens in all countries.⁶⁶

The final draft of the UN outcome document states that: “Our Governments have the primary responsibility for follow-up and review, at the national, regional and global levels, in relation to the progress made in implementing the goals and targets over the coming 15 years”.⁶⁷ It notes that indicators “are being developed to assist this work”; a global indicator framework will be developed by an expert group and agreed by March 2016.⁶⁸

Implementation and monitoring are issues that various parliamentary committees intend to return to. In the previous parliament, the Environmental Audit Committee identified “a clear role for our successor committee [after the general election] to audit implementation and performance against the goals in future”.⁶⁹ This Committee launched an inquiry in July 2015 into the Government’s approach to sustainable development, examining the Government’s key policies; legislative and fiscal agenda; cross-government working and metrics for monitoring performance.⁷⁰ The House of Commons International Development Committee is also currently conducting an inquiry on how the SDGs will or should be implemented.⁷¹ It will also look at cross-government working and metrics for monitoring performance, as well as how DFID should prioritise the SDGs, how it can coordinate its approach with other donors and how it should take a strategic approach to delivery. The House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee called before the summer recess for the SDGs to be debated when the Commons returned in October; as noted above, it drew particular attention to the financial aspects of implementing the large number of goals and targets.⁷²

⁶⁵ HL *Hansard*, 16 June 2015, [col 1134](#).

⁶⁶ *ibid*, [col 1152](#).

⁶⁷ UN General Assembly, [Draft Outcome Document of the United Nations Summit for the Adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda](#), 12 August 2015, A/69/L.85, para 47.

⁶⁸ *ibid*, paras 48 and 75.

⁶⁹ House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, [Connected World: Agreeing Ambitious Sustainable Development Goals in 2015](#), 15 December 2014, HC 452 of session 2014–15, p 37.

⁷⁰ House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, [New Inquiry: The Government’s Approach to Sustainable Development](#), 21 July 2015.

⁷¹ House of Commons International Development Committee, [New Inquiry: Sustainable Development Goals](#), 13 July 2015.

⁷² House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee, [First Report of Session 2015–16](#), 21 July 2015, HC 342-1 of session 2015–16, para 2.10.

Appendix: Sustainable Development Goals

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

* Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.

United Nations, [Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), accessed 7 September 2015.