

# Keynote speech – CES 2013 – Monday, 10 May 2013

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Excellencies,  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

First of all, I would like to thank the Economic Commission for Europe for hosting this conference and Statistics Netherlands for organising this seminar. I'm delighted to herewith open the session on "Measuring sustainable development in follow-up to Rio+20".

The Rio+20 conference last year is indeed an important milestone in the course of discussions about a new framework for sustainable development. But let me start with another important historical track: the **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**. I will come back to the follow-up on Rio+20 later.

For more than a decade, the MDGs have been the dominant development paradigm and organising framework. They have substantially contributed to focus development cooperation efforts and increase accountability. Although the MDGs have never been formally negotiated and endorsed, they have gained wide acceptance and support.

Two years before their 2015 deadline, **broad progress** can be reported: For example: The target of reducing extreme poverty by half has been reached: extreme (income) poverty fell from over 2 billion people (47%) in 1990 to less than 1.4 billion people (24%) in 2008. Since 2010, income poverty is decreasing in every developing region – including in sub-Saharan Africa, where rates are still highest. The target on sustainable access to safe drinking water has also been met and improvements in the lives of 200 million slum dwellers even exceeded the corresponding target. Other MDG targets are also well on track such as hunger, nutrition as well as gender parity in primary education.

Despite this remarkable progress, the achievement of several targets such as maternal mortality or biodiversity is lagging behind. We know very well about the

**weaknesses and shortcomings of the MDG-framework:** For example, the emphasis on global targets went to the detriment of accounting for national circumstances and differences in initial conditions. Not meeting certain globally set targets has led to the perception of failure, especially in the case of African countries, even though substantial progress has been made. A further critique is that the MDGs have masked inequalities: the formulation of targets in terms of averages allows the impression of progress, even in cases where inequality has been growing. In some countries, progress has been concentrated among the better-off whereas the poorest and most vulnerable have seen little or no change.

The MDGs' disproportionate **focus on the social sector** caused **negligence of other important sectors** for sustainable development, such as: environmental aspects, infrastructure, governance issues, human rights, peace and security, or the role of growth and jobs.

Hence, in view of their 2015 expiry date, the MDGs need a successor framework "post-2015" that **integrates all dimensions of sustainable development** (social, economic and environmental) in a balanced way. This time, when establishing a result-oriented and effective new global goal framework, none of the three dimensions of sustainable development may be neglected anymore.

And this is where the **Rio-Agenda** comes in: As you all know, one of the defining moments for sustainable development has been the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit) that was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. It gave birth to a number of international instruments that continue to provide the framework for sustainable development. This includes the **Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI)**, which offer practical approaches to applying sustainable development policies at the local and the national level.

While there are certainly also gaps in coverage, most of the issues that humanity has been struggling with are covered by the chapters of the Agenda 21. However, progress with regard to the objectives of the Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation is far from what was expected in 1992 and 2002.

Therefore, in June 2012, on the occasion of the **Rio+20** Conference on Sustainable Development, another mandate with similar aspirations as with the quest for a successor framework of the MDGs post-2015 was born: the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. The Rio+20 outcome document *The Future We Want* stipulated that an inter-governmental **Open Working Group** shall elaborate a proposal for SDGs. These SDGs should address and incorporate in a balanced way all three dimensions of sustainable development and they shall be coherent with and integrated into the so-called Post-2015 UN Development Agenda.

That's where we stand today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sustainable development has a long history in Switzerland and even roots in the **Swiss constitution**, which outlines our priorities in international relations, amongst others, alleviation of poverty, respect for human rights, peace, and conservation of natural resources.

The main policy focus areas for sustainable development are set out by the **Federal Council in its Sustainable Development Strategy**, which contains guidelines and an action plan, and which is renewed every 4 years. In the current strategy 2012-2015, the Federal Council also declares its commitment with respect to the "renewal of Millennium Development Goals towards targets for global sustainable development".

Furthermore, there is an **Inter-ministerial Sustainable Development Committee** which coordinates the confederation's activities with relevance for sustainable development. It coordinates Swiss positioning in international processes, and reporting to international bodies such as the United Nations. It also fosters relationships within the federal administration as well as with the private sector and civil society.

**Measuring sustainability** has always been a concern in Switzerland. And since 2003 we have been monitoring sustainable development with concrete indicator sys-

tems. First at national level, since 2005 at regional level, and in 2008 a global dimension of sustainable development was added. This monitoring is realised under the responsibility of the Federal Statistical Office (FSO), jointly with the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN), the Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE), and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), which is my own “place of origin”. The monitoring at national level was built up along an intensive dialogue with all federal ministries, and at (Swiss) regional level with the active participation of all Swiss cantons and some cities.

With this national set-up already in place, **Switzerland is ready to expand its engagement** in order to establish an adequate monitoring system which meets the requirements of a new global framework for sustainable development.

Based on the experience with the MDGs and the monitoring of sustainable development, we are of the opinion that **monitoring and reporting will be (and are already) crucial features of a post-2015 framework**. We are looking for indicators that refer to existing datasets and statistics, and which allow for disaggregated data evaluation, for example according to sex, age, disability or ethnic groups. Therefore, statisticians need to be involved early in the process. But this will not be enough. As the **High-Level Panel** of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda stresses in its final report, published end of May: We need a “**data revolution** for sustainable development, with a new international initiative to improve the quality of statistics and information available to citizens.”

In Switzerland, we have launched a broad national consultation process in order to elaborate the overarching **Swiss position on the Post-2015 Agenda**. And in the current version of our position paper, we have added the claim that measuring sustainable development has to be improved at a global level. It has to be based on existing experiences and development achieved by the statistical community, such as the report on “Measuring Sustainable Development” from UNECE, Eurostat and OECD, and it needs a dialogue between statisticians and stakeholders.

In addition to prevalent macroeconomic indicators such as **GDP**, the measure of sustainable development must pay attention to current human well-being, including its

distribution across and within countries, as well as to intergenerational aspects. It must also focus among other things on the depletion of natural resources, climate change and other factors that affect society in a long run.

Here, an important tool is the **System of Economic and Environmental Accounting (SEEA)** that allows monitoring the interactions between the economy and the environment. The indicators of the SEEA help to describe the state of the environment. And this information can complete the GDP.

These first conclusions on measuring sustainable development in the Swiss position have been drawn by the **inter-ministerial Task Force on the Post-2015 Agenda**, which I head and which acts as a kind of a steering committee for the process coordination and the overarching Swiss position. Under the auspices of the Foreign Ministry, this Task Force has so far involved 15 different Federal offices. The national consultations this body is conducting involve the broad public: civil society, private sector, research institutions, etc.

We are currently consolidating a **first overall position** which 1) shall inform the Swiss statement at the High-level event on MDGs and the Post-2015 Agenda in the context of the 68<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly in September, and 2) builds the basis for our future engagement in the context of the Post-2015 Agenda at international level, and in particular for the planned negotiations.

To work out the Swiss positions in specific thematic fields, such as health, education, water, energy, or growth and employment, we established 12 **ad hoc inter-ministerial working groups** which have elaborated the substance for our positioning in each thematic domain.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

In all our engagement at all levels so far, we have repeatedly become aware of the **need to involve the statistics community** as soon as possible: Its know-how as well as its production of harmonised and comparable data are very important. At the same time, rules of independence, transparency and neutrality, which are applied to

statistical work, will not only actively contribute to the definition of indicators and targets but also improve good governance.

Due to its expertise in measuring sustainable development, the **Swiss Federal Statistical Office (FSO)** was involved from the early beginning in the inter-ministerial Task Force I mentioned before. In the discussion of topics, the statisticians answered questions related to indicators and methodology. Although, the international discussion is still held at a rather political and normative level, **technical discussions**, for instance on possible targets or indicators, **have meanwhile started**. The report of the High-level Panel I cited before, for instance, presents already a list of 12 goals and 54 targets. One out of three working groups of the UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 Agenda is working on Monitoring and Indicators. The so-called Bellagio Group already published ideas on goals, targets and indicators last year. Thus, different work streams are already underway – but perhaps not very coordinated. This shows that the time has come to involve the whole expert community in a coordinated fashion.

For all members of the Swiss Task Force the early support of statisticians has been important, because if we talk about **goals** we would like to promote, it does not make much sense to design them in a way that their **achievement cannot be measured**. This could happen if goals were defined inaccurately or if the statistical system could not produce the needed data (now or in the future).

Therefore, Switzerland would herewith like to launch the discussion on the **involvement of statistics** in the ongoing work on goals, indicators and targets. Although this is a political process in the first place, and as negotiations have not started yet, we need your expertise already today.

Let's take the case of the **Open Working Group on SDGs**, where I regularly represent Switzerland. We share a seat in this group with France and Germany. In the beginning, the Co-Chairs (Hungary and Kenya) suggested to treat Means of Implementation, among them issues such as measuring sustainable development, with each topic on the agenda. Now, it is planned to have a specific **session on Means of Implementation in December**. We should be ready for this agenda item and prepare a

substantial input with recommendations by the statistical community. This might be only one out of various windows of opportunity. But I consider it important, that we, the government representatives, the negotiators, learn more about the evolution of the international statistical system and its potential contribution to our political work on the definition of goals. It is crucial that the statistical community offers and shows what already exists and how this substance could be used for the definition of goals.

Therefore, we believe, that the **UN Statistics Division (UNSD)** should be given a specific advisory role for the Open Working Group and other important bodies. One of these bodies will be the **High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development**. Switzerland wants this Forum to take a key role in monitoring. For example, within the High-Level Political Forum, a mechanism for periodic review, accountability and progress reporting of the achievement of goals should be established. Such a mechanism should promote the sharing of best practices and experiences relating to the implementation of sustainable development of the reviewed state and facilitate sharing of experiences. And it should give guidance and recommendations for the implementation of sustainable development commitments of the reviewed state.

Another important body is the **Friends of the Chair group**, set up by the UN Statistics Division, which aim is to build a work programme to develop broader measures of progress and to undertake an active dialogue with the policy sphere.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to conclude by underlining again four aspects that I deem most important:

1. The **policy makers** have to be made clear, visible and understandable, what data, instruments and indicators already exist, and how they can be used. For example, the joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Task Force report on measuring sustainable development is a crucial framework for the measure of SDGs – such “tools” need to be made available to policy makers and negotiators.
2. The **statistical community** should point out where the main challenges are in the global statistical system. A lot of capacity building is needed in this domain. And

this should be best **coordinated by the UN-System** (UNSD, UNDP and others). Other international organisations should extend their development programmes by supporting efforts to improve data quality and the global statistical system as such.

3. Policy makers might not expect the statistical community to co-decide on the definition of goals. But it is evident that statisticians can and should get involved at an early stage of the process in order to allow for **informed decision-taking**, and not least in order to point out the limits of measurement.
  
4. Based on the experiences we have made with the MDGs, I am convinced that we have to **define new goals in a way that they can be monitored** – otherwise they cannot be reached. This might sound easier than it is in reality, since this time we are talking about truly universal goals, applicable to all countries. At the same time these goals shall allow for differentiated approaches and/or country-specific adaptations, meaning for instance national targets.

Having said that, I fully acknowledge and appreciate very much the enormous work that *is*, *was* and *will be* done by statisticians – at national and international level – in the field of measuring and monitoring sustainable development.

There is still time until the expiry of the MDGs, but we should not miss the right moment and opportunity to fully engage the statistical community in this complex process. Because the new goal framework for sustainable development we are dreaming of, has to be measurable at the end of the day. And because – here I would like to cite a saying I recently heard –: “We can only treasure, what we can measure!”

Therefore, I am very happy to be here today and wish you all a very inspiring exchange. Thank you for your attention.