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Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies

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Matters arising

Contribution of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Submitted by the secretariat

Summary

This document presents several ways how the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies – and more generally standards and regulations - can contribute to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

It was prepared by the Secretariat, as an input for discussion by the Working Party on further activities for the implementation of the SDGs.

This document is for decision.

I. Introduction: sustainable development as the key challenge of our times

1. Sustainable development is not a new concept. In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development (the so-called Brundtland Commission), which was

established by the UN, released its report, *Our Common Future*, calling for international action “towards sustainable development”.¹ The report also provided the most authoritative definition of sustainable development to date: “*Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”. At this time already, there was recognition that development should be informed by inter-generational equity concerns. To be sustainable, it should also include economic, social and environmental concerns, the three of which are closely interlinked.

2. The concept has since then gained wide recognition, taking its place at the centre of the international policy agenda. From the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, to the Rio+20 Summit in 2012, to the Post-2015 Development Agenda currently under negotiation, world leaders have repeatedly asserted their commitment to make sustainable development a priority. While substantial progress has been made along the way, notably as a result of the efforts deployed for reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), significant hurdles still need to be overcome. According to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, sustainable development constitutes the central challenge of our times.²

3. At the Rio+20 Conference in 2012, UN Member States agreed to launch a process to develop a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will succeed the MDGs and constitute the cornerstone of the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Faithful to the concept of sustainable development, the goals and targets will integrate economic, social and environmental aspects, while recognizing their interlinkages in achieving sustainable development in all its dimensions. One goal will also focus on key means of implementation, which constitute important cross-cutting enabling factors for the achievement of all the SDGs – such as finance, technology, capacity-building and trade. Below is the final list of SDGs adopted in September 2015 by the World Summit.

II. The Open Working Group proposal for Sustainable Development Goals

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

¹ WCED (The World Commission on Environment and Development) (1987), *Our Common Future*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

² Ban Ki Moon, “Foreword”, in Jeffrey Sachs (2015), *The age of sustainable development*, Columbia University Press, New York.

Sustainable Development Goals

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



Source: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgsproposal>

III. Role of standards in sustainable development

4. The UNECE region, and UNECE as an organization, have played and play a unique role in forging voluntary and regulatory tools that promote international trade and regional integration, sustain business competitiveness, and foster economic and social development. In particular, UNECE sets standards that reduce barriers to trade in goods and services, by creating a common language without which international trade as we know it today would be simply unimaginable.

5. The Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies is currently the only body within the UN system to develop best practice in the domain of technical regulations, standardization, metrology, accreditation, conformity assessment, and market surveillance. It plays a crucial role in promoting the implementation of standards that are the building blocks of sustainable development at national, regional and global levels.

6. Sustainable development is defined as “a pattern of resource use that aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for future generations”. Reaching this goal requires a fundamental change in current patterns of consumption and production – which will also have an important impact on international trade.

7. Standards are already helping companies conceive, produce and market cleaner and more energy-efficient products. They play a key role in monitoring and improving the quality and reliability of production processes, so as to reduce their ecological footprint and impact on the environment and fragile ecosystems. They also prevent industrial accidents and insure that resources are used responsibly and are preserved for future generations.

8. Many standards have been and are being developed to assess and develop various aspects of sustainability. Even excluding standards related to food and feed, as well as health, sectors in which the WP. 6 has not played an active role, the list is potentially endless. The following are just a few examples:

(a) Standards are the foundation of international trade – indeed trade would simply be un-imaginable without international standards – and so play a key role in supporting goal 17.10 “promote a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system”

(b) Standards are developed by world-class experts in their respective fields. They bring a reservoir of technological know-how and knowledge – including knowledge that allows for an efficient use of resources in production and in consumption - to the factory floor. As such, governments should tap into their potential for the realization of the SDG Goal 8 “Sustainable economic growth” and SDG Goal 9 “Resilient infrastructure, industrialization and innovation”.

(c) Systemic risk management standards – including ISO 31000 – defined as tools that help both business and policy-makers attain their objectives in the face of uncertainty – are crucial to designing a new pattern of development – notably as concerns building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation (Goal 9). Likewise tools such as emergency management standards and emergency management standards help make development resilient to disasters (Goals 1.5, 2.4 and 11.b)

(d) Standards on electrotechnical equipment, electricity plants and electrically powered utilities including water utilities - such as those developed by the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) - and on “energy management” – such as the ISO 50000 family on energy management and energy conservation can contribute to Goal 7:

“Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all” and Goal 6 on the “Sustainable management of water and sanitation to all”

(e) Additionally, power outages can, in and of themselves, trigger human and environmental disasters or contribute to the knock on effect of natural disasters. Standards such as those mentioned in (a) above then contribute to reduce the impact of disasters on lives and livelihoods, contributing to disaster risk reduction and in particular its effects on the vulnerable (see goal 1.5).

(f) Standards on equipment and installations for the production of renewable energy as well as the ISO 14000 family on environmental management can contribute to the realization of Goal 12 – on ensuring sustainable production and consumption patterns – specifically as regards the release of wastes and their release to air, water and soil in order to minimize their adverse impacts on human health and the environment

(g) UNECE standards on PPPs, as well as the ISO 26000 which “provides guidance to all types of organizations, regardless of their size or location, on (...) integrating, implementing and promoting socially responsible behavior throughout the organization and, through its policies and practices, within its sphere of influence” – is one possible means of implementation of Goal 17 on strengthening the means of implementation – specifically as regards the promoting effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships;

(h) Standards – both those being developed under the umbrella of the UNECE Working Party on Sustainable Housing and those being developed under the ISO Technical Committee on “Sustainable development in communities” can contribute to Goal 11 as it refers to making cities inclusive, sustainable and resilient to disasters.

Standards incorporate international best practice in each of these sectors and of course many more and more generally have “the potential to play a leading role in promoting sustainable development in all of its three spheres: economic growth, environmental integrity, and societal equity” (Mr. Hakan Murby, then President of ISO, 2009).

IV. Standards as part of a regulatory framework that supports the SDGs

9. While standards are important, they are only so if they are properly used and implemented. Ultimately, the goal of standards is changing the characteristics of products and production processes. Clearly, this requires assessing the conformity of products, processes, and services, against the standards’ requirements. In many cases, technical regulations are needed to complement voluntary standards, and to ensure and monitor compliance. Regulatory enforcement requires a complex system, the “national quality infrastructure system”, which includes an array of private and public sector bodies, i.e. metrology institutions, accreditation and conformity assessment bodies, as well as testing laboratories.

10. These institutions play a key role in moving towards a sustainable pattern of development. Let’s take as an example the energy classification of household equipment. How can we be sure that the labels affixed to the products in shops and at home indeed provide truthful information on compliance with the relevant norms and regulations? While each regulatory system is different, in general, controls on labelling requirements are carried out by market surveillance authorities. These public institutions work in synergy with the country’s national quality infrastructure institutions, and the producers and distributors also contribute to ensure that products are safe and compliant.

11. Currently, market surveillance authorities, and the whole quality infrastructure system is severely underfunded, not just in transition economies but also in some of the most advanced countries of the UNECE region. Markets across the UNECE are flooded with products that do not comply with regulations in force, and that are not responsibly produced. In these circumstances, investing in a better and more sustainable future becomes an impossible task for those businesses that care, but that are unable to compete against those that do not respect the same rules and do not take the same engagements. The Working Party, through its Group of Experts on Market Surveillance (MARS) is developing best practice for market surveillance authorities, with the aim of guiding their operations, from the planning of inspections to the recall of products, and making them more responsive to the needs of business and consumers.

V. The specific contribution of UNECE Working Party 6

12. As mentioned above, the UNECE plays a unique role in developing the capacity of countries – and in particular countries with economies in transition that face specific challenges - to implement standards and technical regulations, especially in sectors that have a critical impact on sustainability and on resilience to natural and man-made hazards.

13. Within this organizational context, the role of the WP. 6 work as it relates to the SDGs is:

- To promote the use of standards by policy-makers and business
- To integrate standards in regulatory frameworks
- To promote the use of standards in the implementation of UN-wide goals, including the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and the Sendai framework for action

14. Relevant ongoing initiatives of WP.6 to support SDGs as follows:

(a) Creating common regulatory frameworks in specific sectors where countries have jointly defined common regulations and common ways of assessing compliance with these regulations – potentially enabling products can move freely within the markets of participating countries - without additional controls by the country’s designated authorities. This supports Goal 17.10 referenced above. The activities of the WP. 6 have been particularly successful in the fields of equipment for explosive environments and earth-moving machinery: where the WP. 6 work has contributed sustainable and resilient infrastructure (SDG 9) Given sufficient resources, this experience could usefully be replicated in other sectors that are of key importance to addressing sustainable development issues, such as polluting or energy-intensive products.

(b) Education on standardization: WP.6 encourages Member States to improve the position of standardization in education programmes and academic curricula and to increase public knowledge about standardization. (SDG 4)

(c) The Group of Experts on “Risk management in regulatory systems” (GRM) which resulted in the adoption of:

- (i) Recommendation R on “Risk management in Regulatory Systems” – that aims to build the capacity of all stakeholders in a country’s regulatory system, including its quality infrastructure institutions, to manage risks of all kinds, including risks to the environment and ecosystems (Goal 13 and 15)
- (ii) Recommendations P on “Crisis Management in Regulatory Systems” that presses governments to design and implement crisis management functions as part of the regulatory frameworks of all key economic sectors, integrating best practice from

international standards in the management of emergencies. Through this group, the WP.6 works to build capacity for disaster risk management through the use of voluntary standards. (SDGs 11 and 12)

15. Building on this line of work, the WP. 6 has launched an ambitious collaboration with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) and with standards-setting organizations to make standardized guidelines supporting disaster risk reduction (DRR) more readily available and accessible to authorities, policymakers, small and medium-sized enterprises, non-governmental organizations, universities and local communities.

16. This work has started with a research project – undertaken in the context of the UNISDR Global Assessment Report (see: http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/wp6/AreasOfWork/RiskManagement/paper_UNECE_final.pdf) and has culminated in the participation of UNECE in the World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, with the organization of an event on “Standards and DRR” (<http://www.wcdr.org/conference/events/885>).

17. Currently, the Working Party is working towards the establishment of a UN-wide working group to further considerations related to the SDGs and to resilience into the work of ISO and other standardization bodies.

18. In all its activities, the Working Party has established strong cooperation with other institutions, especially, international, regional and national standards-development bodies and other UN agencies (such as ISO, IEC, UNIDO, ITC, etc).

19. Given sufficient resources, the Working Party is an ideal forum for cooperating with this network with the goal of ensuring that standards and technical regulations really deliver on sustainable development.
