

With Professor Thomas Pogge on the SDGs

Thomas Pogge, November 6th 2014:



The UN General Assembly's Open Working Group (OWG) on the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** has formulated a draft of the SDGs, proposing **17 goals**, which summarize **169 targets**. There is still time to improve the draft in the run-up to the UNGA meeting in September 2015. Among the most important improvements to be made are these.

(1) Goal 10, to reduce inequality, looks laudable but then laughable upon inspection: we should “by 2030 progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40% of the population at a rate higher than the national average.” In other words, inequality may increase without limit until 2030 so long as it then starts declining just before the SDGs expire.

(2) After witnessing many cosmetic revisions of definitions and measurement methods involved in the Millennium Development Goals, with each revision making our efforts against poverty look more impressive, we should insist that no such revisions be allowed from now on. Moreover, the measurement of progress should not be left to politically exposed and vulnerable international agencies, such as the World Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organization, but be entrusted to a group of respectable academic experts.

(3) The SDGs should not merely express wishes that this or that should happen but should assign concrete tasks to competent agents, esp. to the most powerful governments and enterprises. Here reforms of the structural causes of poverty are crucial. The rich countries should agree to stop facilitating illicit financial outflows from the poor countries, to stop imposing their protectionism and pollution on the world without compensation, to stop blocking poor populations' access to advanced medicines, to stop blocking the adoption of decent global labor standards, and to stop supporting dictators by paying them for their countries' natural resources or by lending them money or selling them arms.

Never has persistent severe poverty been more easily avoidable and hence a greater moral scandal. We must eradicate it as quickly as we possibly can.

—
Mr Thomas Pogge is the Director of the Global Justice Program and the Leitner Professor of Philosophy and International Affairs at Yale University.

He is also president of **Academics Stand Against Poverty** (ASAP), an international professional association focused on helping poverty researchers and teachers enhance their positive impact on severe poverty. He is the author of several well-known books, such as *World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reforms* (second edition, 2008), *Freedom from Poverty as a Human Right: Who Owes What to the Very Poor?* (editor, 2007), *John Rawls: His Life and Theory of*

Justice (2007), and *Realizing Rawls* (1989).
For more on Thomas Pogge, visit his [website](#).