ESSAY

From Sustainable Development Goals to Basic Development Goals

Kenneth A. Reinert

Within the United Nations system, development policy is currently framed in terms of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The earlier Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) had some prominent defenders; notably Jeffrey Sachs, who praised them because they "packaged" priorities into "an easily understandable set of eight goals."[1] The same cannot be said of the SDGs. Sachs's original vision for the SDGs was for there to be relatively *few* of them. In the end, however, there ended up being seventeen SDGs and 169 targets. The result is a highly aspirational and poorly focused list of desired outcomes that is too unwieldy to translate into effective policy.

As a result of their unwieldy nature, the SDGs have attracted some prominent critics; most notably, Bill Easterly, who referred to them as "senseless, dreamy, garbled" and noted that the SDGs are "so encyclopedic that everything is top priority, which means nothing is a priority."[2] This inability to set priorities is a real drawback in a world with so many development and human security challenges.

This essay presents a more focused way to set development goals. It proposes a set of "basic development goals" (BDGs) to replace the SDGs. The advantages of the BDGs are as follows:

- They are few in number.
- They are less ambiguous than the existing SDGs.
- They are crafted to closely address basic human needs and the basic goods and services that satisfy these needs.
- They are fully conformable to existing UN language on basic subsistence rights.
- They are more attainable than the existing SDGs.

Ethics & International Affairs, 34, no. 2 (2020), pp. 125–137.

doi:10.1017/S0892679420000180

Before setting out the specifics of the BDGs, we will briefly consider the SDGs and their limitations.

Overly Ambiguous

In the transition from the MDGs to the SDGs, the number of goals increased from eight to seventeen, and the targets increased from 21 to 169.[3] The resulting SDG targets are a mix of measures based on income, human capabilities achievement, basic goods provision, specific policies, expenditures, and physical outcomes (for example, emissions). Rather than setting specific areas of focus, the SDGs try to enforce too many outcomes, some of which are far removed from the relevant policies that determine the outcomes.[4] This limits their usefulness.

First, the SDGs are simply too broad in scope to be effective. Anyone who spends time looking through their 169 targets will experience a sense of cognitive overload. Indeed, they are so complex that researchers have resorted to network analysis techniques to make sense of them.[5] There are also efforts underway to recast the SDGs via "transformations."[6] Their overly broad scope, implemented throughout the UN system, wastes time and resources.

Second, many of the SDG targets are too vague. Consider, for example, target 12.8: "By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature." Or consider target 16.6: "Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels."[7] These are desirable outcomes, but even if it were technically possible to meet these targets, it would be a practical impossibility to actually measure whether this had occurred.

This is not to say that the SDGs lack all relevance. For example, goal 1 refers to eliminating poverty, a key development objective. However, it is stated as follows: "End poverty in *all its forms everywhere*" (emphasis added). It is impossible to end poverty in all its forms everywhere because relative poverty will always exist. Additionally, some of the related targets are unhelpful. For example, target 1.3: "Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable." It is not clear what this means. Social protection (including floors) can be of many varieties. Similarly, target 1.4 calls for "access to basic services,"[8] but to which services it does not say.

Target 2.1 of goal 2 on food security is much more to the point: "By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679420000180 Published online by Cambridge University Press

vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round." But target 2.4 states: "By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality."[9] These are important aspirational goals, but not effective targets.

Goal 3 is on health (undeniably a good thing), but it, again, consists of too many targets, including "promote mental health and well-being" (part of target 3.4) and "universal health coverage" (part of target 3.8),[10] neither of which will ever be assured for all, and certainly not by 2030. Even ignoring the fact that there are many competing conceptions of wellbeing, it is much more effective to focus on the *determinants* of wellbeing, such as universal access to primary health care, rather than on its vague outcomes.

Clean water and sanitation are two further important health determinants, and these are indeed considered in goal 6. Target 6.1 is, "By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all"; and target 6.2 is, "By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations."[11] It would have been better to stop there in order to focus the efforts of development groups, but many more targets were added on to goal 6, thus diluting and confusing the message. This is a pattern across all seventeen goals.

As a last example, take goal 4 on education, which, again, has many targets. Target 4.7 states: "By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development."[12] Just this single target represents a very large agenda, one that is not measurable, much less attainable. The pattern of admirable aspirations running amok characterizes the whole SDG project. A new, more focused approach is needed.

The Foundation of Human Need

A focus on development determinants moves us in the direction of placing development goals and targets on the firm foundation of "human need." Indeed, as stated by Jeffrey Sachs, this was to be the original approach to the SDGs, which

> should aim . . . to secure the basic material needs—and human rights—of everybody on the planet. To declare that by 2030, all extreme deprivation—hunger, extreme income poverty, and avoidable disease and deaths—can be eliminated is both realistic and profound. All individuals should be able to access safe water and sanitation, electricity, connection to information and communication technology, and primary health care, and be protected from natural hazards. Many places will remain poor, but no place should be destitute, unable to meet these basic needs.[13]

In this statement, Sachs explicitly recognized the importance of "basic needs" and the basic goods and services that meet those needs. Modern economics often ignores the distinction between needs and wants, viewing needs as preferences. This is at odds with some important strands of social policy and moral philosophy. For example, Len Doyal and Ian Gough emphasize that needs are both knowable and universal. They argue that "basic human needs . . . stipulate what persons must achieve if they are to avoid sustained and serious harm."[14] Hartley Dean frames it this way: "Human need represents a pivotally important concept and, arguably, the most important organizing principle in social policy."[15] And David Braybrooke puts it most bluntly: "The concept of needs differs top and bottom from the concept of preferences."[16]

Beyond their conceptual validity, human needs are verifiable, developmentally related to the human condition, and directly connected to human wellbeing.[17] For example, James Griffin defines wellbeing as "the level to which basic needs are met so long as they retain importance."[18] For a need to be authentic, it must support the life of the human organism, and serious deprivations of basic needs have potentially severe ramifications for the human organism. Hence Sachs's mention of "avoidable disease and deaths."

Further, if we look closely, human needs do appear as a valid concept in the field of economics. For example, Angus Deaton and John Muellbauer identified necessities as those goods for which the income elasticity of demand is less than one, and budget shares fall with income level.[19] J. L. Baxter and I. A. Moosa sharpen this concept, providing an explicit list of basic-needs characteristics, arguing that they must be universal, satiable, measurable, stable, and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679420000180 Published online by Cambridge University Press

absolute, among other things.[20] They also show that necessities are characterized by income elasticities of demand that are less than one; income elasticities of demand that decline with income levels; and household expenditures that are more stable than in other categories. Finally, in an extensive review of human needs from a bioeconomics perspective, Peter Corning echoed most of Baxter and Moosa's conceptualization of needs.[21] He concluded that needs are "the inner logic . . . of economic life" and "the skeletal structure upon which economies are built."[22] To close his review, he stated that "to deny the relevance of our primary biological needs is to deny reality." Shifting to the ethical sphere, he referred to the meeting of basic needs as "an increasingly urgent moral imperative."[23]

Development goals that focus closely on the concept of human needs are more likely to be relevant than those that stray from this concept. How are these basic needs to be addressed? The relevant determinants include the provision of basic goods and services, or just "basic goods." Basic goods and services include nutritious food, clean water, sanitation services, health services, education services, housing, electricity, and human security services. These categories are indeed recognized in the SDGs but are too deeply buried among other concerns to be effectively addressed.

Basic Development Goals and Basic Rights

Suppose that we took the role of basic goods provision as an important determinant of human wellbeing. What would a more practical reconstitution of the SDGs in terms of basic goods and services provision look like? What I propose is depicted in table 1 as a set of basic development goals (BDGs) that preserve the order and wording but not the actual numbering of the SDGs. The seven goals of the BDGs address food security, health, education, water and sanitation, energy, housing, and human security. Rather than 169 targets, there are only 10. In contrast to the SDGs, the relatively narrow scope of the BDGs provides a tighter focus on human wellbeing, making forward progress on these measures more possible, and accountability more likely.

Each of the BDGs in table 1 is motivated by its direct connection to basic needs:

- **Goal 1 (food security)**: directed toward the satisfaction of basic caloric needs, vitamins, minerals, and other micronutrients.
- **Goal 2 (health)**: focuses on minimal health levels that, in turn, require primary health services and requisite medical inputs.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679420000180 Published online by Cambridge University Press

TABLE 1. Basic development goals

Basic development goal	Target	Corresponding basic/subsistence rights documents	Level of deprivation
Goal 1: Food security	Target 1.1: Ensure access by all people to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food.	Article 25 of the UDHR (1948) Article 11 of the ICESCR (1966) General Comment 12 in the ICESCR (1999)	Over 800 million people suffer from chronic hunger, and 2 billion people experience food insecurity.
Goal 2: Health	Target 2.1: End preventable deaths of newborns and children under five years of age through the delivery of universal primary healthcare. Target 2.2: End the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria.	Article 25 of the UDHR (1948) Article 12 of the ICESCR (1966) Declaration of Alma-Ata (1978) General comment 14 in the ICESCR (2000)	Over 5 million infants and children die each year, largely from preventable causes.
Goal 3: Education	Target 3.1: Ensure that all children have access to and complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education. Target 3.2: Ensure that all children have access to quality preprimary education.	Articles 25 and 26 of the UDHR (1948) Article 13 of the ICESCR (1966) UNESCO Incheon Declaration (2015)	Over 500 million adults and 100 million youth are illiterate.
Goal 4: Water and sanitation	Target 4.1: Achieve universal access to safe and affordable drinking water for all. Target 4.2: Achieve universal access to adequate sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation.	General comment 15 in the ICESCR (2003) United Nations General Assembly Resolution (2010) United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution (2010) United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution (2014)	Over 800 million people lack access to improved drinking water sources, over 2 billion people do not have access to clean and safe toilets, and approximately 900 people million practice open defecation.

Goal 5: Energy	Target 5.1: Ensure universal access to affordable and reliable electricity services.	Article 25 of the UDHR (1948) Article 11 of the ICESCR Article 14 of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	Over 850 million people lack access to electricity.
Goal 6: Housing	Target 6.1: Ensure universal access adequate, safe, and affordable housing.	Article 25 of the UDHR (1948) Article 11 of the ICESCR (1966) General comment 4 in the ICESCR (1991) General comment 7 in the ICESCR (1998)	Number of people without homes unknown but includes approximately 70 million forcibly displaced people.
Goal 7: Human security	Target 7.1: Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates.	Preamble and Article 3 of the UDHR (1948) United Nations World Summit (2005)	Half-a-million people die each year as a result of armed violence.

Sources: Volker Busch-Geertsema, Dennis Culhane, and Suzanne Fitzpatrick, "A Global Framework for Understanding and Measuring Homelessness" (paper presented at the Homelessness in a Global Landscape Conference, Institute for Global Homelessness, De Paul University, Chicago, June 2015); Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World: Building Climate Resilience for Security and Nutrition* (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2019); Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, *Global Burden of Armed Violence 2015: Every Body Counts* (Geneva: Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, 2015), www.genevadeclaration.org/measurability/global-burden-of-armed-violence/global-burden-of-armed-violence-2015.html; Kenneth A. Reinert, *No Small Hope: Towards the Universal Provision of Basic Goods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, *Levels and Trends in Child Mortality* (New York: United Nations Children's Fund, September 2019); UNICEF and World Health Organization, *Progress on Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: 2017 Update and SDG Baselines* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2017), www.unicef.org/publications/files/Progress_on_Drinking_Water_Sanitation_and_Hygiene_2017.pdf.

Note: UDHR = Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); ICESCR = International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.

- **Goal 3 (education)**: refers to the preprimary, primary, and secondary education services required for both social participation and remaining healthy.
- **Goal 4 (water and sanitation)**: focuses on these two crucial elements that are required for survival, basic health, and human dignity.
- **Goal 5 (energy)**: outlines needs for lighting, refrigeration, air conditioning, and communication that support health and social participation.
- **Goal 6 (housing)**: focuses on protecting individuals from the elements, providing a space for food preparation and hygiene, and social participation.
- **Goal 7 (human security)**: lays out the set of basic services that protects bodily integrity and prevents injury and death as a result of violence.

In order to address the most urgent priorities when it comes to the improvement of human welfare on a global scale, I have chosen the ten targets indicated in table 1 with an eye toward maximizing multifunctionality. Safe drinking water and effective sanitation are primary determinants of health, for example, and electricity services support health, education, and overall economic productivity. The targets I have chosen may elicit debate among members of the development community, but I argue that they provide a strong foundation for a development agenda. For example, one could make a compelling argument that goal 2 on health should include a target on maternal mortality. I have not included this category in the table because any focus on child mortality (target 2.1) necessarily also focuses on the health and education of mothers, including prenatal and maternal care.[24] Furthermore, at the global level, maternal mortality is an order of magnitude *smaller* than infant and child mortality, with cases being in the hundreds of thousands rather than the millions.

As presented in table 1, the BDGs have a close relationship to the fulfillment of the basic subsistence-rights provisions of the UN system. This is an important contrast with the SDGs. As some researchers have noted, the SDGs have only a tentative link to rights. Graham Long, for example, noted that "the language of rights . . . is almost wholly absent" from these goals.[25] Similarly, Noha Shawki noted that "the SDGs overall are still fairly tentative in recognizing moral and/or legal duties."[26] In contrast, the BDGs can be directly mapped to such duties.

There are two fundamental statements of basic subsistence rights within the UN system. The first of these is the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights

(UDHR). Article 25 of the UDHR states that "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services."[27] Article 26 of the UDHR extends this to educational services.

The 1976 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) reiterates what is stated in Article 25 of the UDHR. Article 11 of the ICESCR recognizes "the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing" and "to be free from hunger."[28] Together, Articles 25 and 26 of the UDHR and Article 11 of the ICESCR form the foundation for subsistence rights within the UN system.

Beyond these two statements, table 1 shows that there are many other statements regarding basic subsistence rights that map directly onto the BDGs. The conformability of the BDGs to the basic rights framework of the UN is an important feature of these goals.

Despite some intellectual and political resistance to the concept of subsistence rights, their validity has been affirmed in political and human rights theory. As demonstrated by Henry Shue, even standard or negative political rights require that some "positive action" be taken in the form of the provision of basic human security services, legal services, and judicial services.[29] Indeed, it can be difficult or even impossible to exercise political rights when severely deprived of subsistence goods and services. Since the distinction between negative and positive rights is a false one, Shue introduced the concept of "basic rights"; namely those rights that must be fulfilled so that other rights can be enjoyed. With these basic rights come three correlative duties: to avoid depriving, to protect from deprivation, and to aid the deprived.[30]

Despite Shue's convincing arguments, there is still lingering resistance to extending human rights concepts to subsistence rights.[31] To get a better sense of the relevance of subsistence rights, consider the following statement by Hertel and Minkler:

> Suppose that any individual was not entitled to an adequate standard of living. She would not be entitled to be free from malnutrition, would not be entitled to be free from the exposure to the elements, and would not be entitled to be free from crippling illness. Such an individual would not be assured of the minimal conditions necessary to be autonomous . . . or a purposeful agent because she could not fulfill her own plans or objectives or be free from deprivations.[32]

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679420000180 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The relevance of subsistence rights is also reiterated by Charles Beitz, who stated that "the interests protected by these rights are among the most . . . urgent of all human interests and the least open to variation by culture."[33] Using the concept of "strong beneficence," Beitz also directly addressed the claim by Onora O'Neill that subsistence rights are merely aspirational.[34] Strong beneficence indicates that when deciding to act, one must weigh urgency, eligible agents, and reasonable costs. In his review of these, Beitz concludes that, while "judgements about responsibilities to act will have to be pragmatic," this required pragmatism "does nothing to reduce or cancel the force of the reasons to act" in cases providing for subsistence rights.[35]

In the introduction to a co-edited volume on the subject of basic rights, Beitz and Robert Goodin point to some ambiguity with regard to correlative duties and the role of institutions in mediating between rights and duties (what Shue conceptualizes as "mediating duties") and other contributors in the volume go on to effectively address these issues.[36] For example, Christian Reus-Smit emphasizes the role of basic rights as playing a power-mediating function between individuals and groups, including individuals and political institutions.[37] Neta Crawford sketches the possibility of virtuous and vicious causal connections between the institutional cultivation of ethical predispositions and basic rights fulfilment, stating:

> Before and during our earliest socialization humans must have their basic biological . . . needs met. Our brains, including the capacity for reasoning, cannot fully develop without nutrition and basic education . . . . The development of individual moral capacities is stunted in conditions of poverty and traumatic fear.[38]

For our purposes, the strong foundation these scholars provide for Shue's concept of basic rights further highlights its relevance to the BDGs.

Table 1 provides information on current levels of basic goods *deprivations*. While these reflect some real progress over time, they also represent extensive levels of deprivation and, therefore, violations of basic subsistence rights. Most notably, today over eight hundred million people suffer from chronic hunger and two billion people experience food insecurity; there are over five hundred million illiterate adults and one hundred million illiterate youth; over eight hundred million people lack access to improved drinking water sources; over two billion people do not have access to clean and safe toilets; and over 850 million individuals lack

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679420000180 Published online by Cambridge University Press

access to electricity. The scale of these deprivations should not escape notice, and the BDGs put them front and center.

Conclusion: Back to Sustainability

Addressing the weaknesses of the SDGs requires a return to human needs and basic subsistence rights. The set of BDGs I propose better focuses attention on what *really matters*, involves the actual *determinants* of desired outcomes, and focuses on violations of *basic subsistence rights*. One potential criticism of the BDGs is that they leave out "sustainability." However, this is not necessarily the case. As Simon Caney points out, there are important connections between climate change and subsistence rights as defined by the BDGs.[39] One important issue here, raised by Henry Shue himself, is the identification and establishment of "subsistence emissions."[40] More recently, sustainability research has been explicitly linked to the basic goods approach through an examination of "decent living emissions."[41] Further, implicit in goals 1, 4, and 5 of the BDGs is the emerging issue of the water-energy-food nexus. This is a very active area of research and policy analysis that is at the forefront of sustainability and development. Sorting out water-energy-food dilemmas (potentially through agroecology, smart irrigation, renewable energy, and renewable energy source desalination) would go a long way toward addressing sustainability issues.[42] In these ways, sustainability issues are actually woven into the BDGs.

NOTES

[1] Jeffrey D. Sachs, "From Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals," *Lancet* 379, no. 9832 (June 9, 2012), p. 2206.

[2] William Easterly, "The SDGs Should Stand for Senseless, Dreamy, Garbled," *Foreign Policy*, September 28, 2015, foreignpolicy.com/2015/09/28/the-sdgs-are-utopian-and-worthless-mdgs-development-rise-of-the-rest/. See also "Development: The 169 Commandments; the Proposed Sustainable Development Goals Would Be Worse than Useless," *Economist*, March 28, 2015. This article describes the SDGs as "a mess."

[3] See United Nations, "Millennium Development Goals Indicators," mdgs.un.org; and United Nations, "Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform," sustainabledevelopment.un.org. One original vision for the SDGs put forward by the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons called for only twelve goals and fifty-four targets. See United Nations, *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies and Sustainable Development* (New York: United Nations, 2013), sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/8932013-05%20-%20HLP%20Report%20-%20A%20New%20Global%20Partnership.pdf.

[4] On differentiating between determinants and outcomes, see World Bank, *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2011), openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/4391.

[5] David Le Blanc, "Towards Integration at Last? The Sustainable Development Goals as a Network of Targets," *Sustainable Development* 23, no. 3 (April 2015), pp. 176–87.

[6] See Jeffrey D. Sachs, Guido Schmidt-Traub, Mariana Mazzucato, Dirk Messner, Nebojsa Nakicenovic, and Johan Rockström, "Six Transformations to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals," *Nature Sustainability* 2 (2019), pp. 805–14.
[7] Target 12.8 in "Sustainable Development Goal 12," Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform, United Nations, sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg12; and target 16.6 in "Sustainable Development Goal 16," Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform, United Nations, sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg16.
[8] "Sustainable Development Goals," Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform, United Nations, sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs (italics added); and targets 1.3 and 1.4 in "Sustainable Development Goal 1," Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform, United Nations, sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg1.
[9] Targets 2.1 and 2.4 in "Sustainable Development Goal 2," Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform, United Nations, sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg2.
[10] Targets 3.4 and 3.8 in "Sustainable Development Goal 3," Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform, United Nations, sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg3.
[11] Targets 6.1 and 6.2 in "Sustainable Development Goal 6," Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform, United Nations, sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg6.
[12] Target 4.7 in "Sustainable Development Goal 4," Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform, United Nations, sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4.
[13] Sachs, "From Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals," p. 2208.
[14] Len Doyal and Ian Gough, *A Theory of Human Need* (New York: Guilford, 1991), p. 50.
[15] Hartley Dean, *Understanding Human Need: Social Issues, Policy and Practice* (Bristol, U.K.: Policy, 2010), p. 2.
[16] David Braybrooke, *Meeting Needs* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 5.
[17] See Kenneth A. Reinert, *No Small Hope: Towards the Universal Provision of Basic Goods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).
[18] James Griffin, *Well-Being: Its Meaning, Measurement and Moral Importance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), p. 42.
[19] Angus Deaton and John Muellbauer, *Economics and Consumer Behavior* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1980). The income elasticity of demand measures the responsiveness of household demand with respect to changes in income.
[20] J. L. Baxter and I. A. Moosa, "The Consumption Function: A Basic Needs Hypothesis," *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 31, no. 1 (October 1996), pp. 85–100.
[21] Peter A. Corning, "Biological Adaptation in Human Societies: A 'Basic Needs' Approach," *Journal of Bioeconomics* 2, no. 1 (January 2000), pp. 41–86.
[22] Ibid., p. 79.
[23] Ibid., p. 80. Similar ethical language was independently used by Kenneth A. Reinert, "No Small Hope: The Basic Goods Imperative," *Review of Social Economy* 69, no. 1 (March 2011), pp. 55–76.
[24] See, for example, United Nations Children's Fund, *Committing to Child Survival: A Promise Renewed*, Progress Report 2013 (New York: UNICEF, 2013), www.unicef.org/publications/files/2013_APR_Progress_Report_Summary_EN_10_Sept_2013.pdf; and United Nations Children's Fund, *Committing to Child Survival: A Promise Renewed*, Progress Report 2015 (New York: UNICEF, 2015), www.unicef.org/publications/index_83078.html.
[25] Graham Long, "The Idea of Universality in the Sustainable Development Goals," *Ethics & International Affairs* 29, no. 2 (Summer 2015), p. 204.
[26] Noha Shawki, "Global Basic Rights, Positive Duties, Extraterritorial Obligations, and Mediating Institutions: Do the Sustainable Development Goals Deepen the Institutionalization of a Global Responsibility to End Poverty?," *Social Alternatives* 37, no.1 (2018), p. 9.
[27] Article 25, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, December 10, 1948, www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/.
[28] Article 11, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, January 3, 1976, www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx.
[29] Henry Shue, *Basic Rights: Subsistence, Affluence, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).
[30] Ibid., p. 52.
[31] See, for example, Ş. İglü Özler, "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights at Seventy: Progress and Challenges," *Ethics & International Affairs* 32, no. 4 (Winter 2018), pp. 395–406.
[32] Shareen Hertel and Lanse Minkler, "Economic Rights: The Terrain," in Shareen Hertel and Lanse Minkler, eds., *Economic Rights: Conceptual, Measurement, and Policy Issues* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 5.

[33] Charles R. Beitz, *The Idea of Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 103.
[34] Onora O'Neill, "The Dark Side of Human Rights," *International Affairs* 81, no. 2 (March 2005), pp. 427–39.
[35] Beitz, *Idea of Human Rights*, p. 174. Regarding the reasonable cost aspect of "strong beneficence," see chapter 12 of Reinert, *No Small Hope: Towards the Universal Provision of Basic Goods*.
[36] Charles R. Beitz and Robert E. Goodin, "Introduction: Basic Rights and Beyond," in Charles R. Beitz and Robert E. Goodin, eds., *Global Basic Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 1–24. See also Henry Shue, "Mediating Duties," *Ethics* 98, no. 4 (July 1988), in which the author calls for "the design and creation of positive-duty-performing institutions that do not yet exist and for the modification or transformation of existing institutions that now ignore rights and the positive duties that all rights involve" (p. 703).
[37] Christian Reus-Smit, "On Rights and Institutions," in Beitz and Goodin, *Global Basic Rights*, pp. 25–48.
[38] Neta C. Crawford, "No Borders, No Bystanders: Developing Individual and Institutional Capacities for Global Moral Responsibility," in Beitz and Goodin, *Global Basic Rights*, pp. 131–55.
[39] Simon Caney, "Human Rights, Responsibilities, and Climate Change," in Beitz and Goodin, *Global Basic Rights*, pp. 227–47.
[40] Henry Shue, "Subsistence Emissions and Luxury Emissions," *Law and Policy* 15, no. 1 (January 1993), pp. 39–60.
[41] See, for example, Narisimha D. Rao and Paul Baer, "'Decent Living' Emissions: A Conceptual Framework," *Sustainability* 4, no. 4 (2012), pp. 656–81. These authors' list of "decent living activities" closely mirrors the BDGs outlined here.
[42] Eloise M. Biggs, Eleanor Bruce, Bryan Boruff, John M. A. Duncan, Julia Horsley, Natasha Pauli, Kellie McNeill, et al., "Sustainable Development and the Water–Energy–Food Nexus: A Perspective on Livelihoods," *Environmental Science & Policy* 54 (December 2015), pp. 389–97.

Abstract: The Sustainable Development Goals have attracted both defenders and critics. Composed of seventeen goals and 169 targets, the overly broad scope of the SDGs raises the question of whether there are priorities that need to be set within them. This essay considers the SDGs from the perspective of a "basic goods approach" to development policy, which takes a needs-based and basic-subsistence-rights view on policy priorities. It focuses on a subset of SDGs that directly address the provision of nutritious food, clean water, sanitation, health services, education services, and human security services. In doing so, it proposes a set of seven "basic development goals" and ten associated targets. It argues that this more focused approach can better protect basic rights, more effectively contribute to progress on human wellbeing, and make accountability more likely.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, basic needs, basic rights, subsistence rights