

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) fall due in 2015 and many people are asking what happens next? What is the plan and what are the priorities? This has become known as the “post-2015” debate. Yet, search the official documents and there is very little to be found relating to the role communication rights, mass and social media are to play in this brave new world.

In 2012 the United Nations (UN) Conference on Sustainable Development, took place in Brazil. Known as Rio+20, it agreed to establish an “Open Working Group” of government representatives to make a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A key question was how the SDGs would relate to or advance the earlier MDGs.

In August 2014 the Open Working Group on SDGs reported to the UN General Assembly, setting out 17 goals for the period 2015 to 2030:

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries.
11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and pro-

duction patterns.

13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

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.

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.

17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.



Once again communication received short shrift, with barely a mention under Goal 16, “Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms” – presumably including freedom of expression and opinion.

This happened despite many UN-related agencies and most civil society organisations agreeing that strengthening communications, independent and pluralistic media, and improving access to information and communication technologies play an essential role in the development of today’s in-

formation societies and communities.

The year 2015 also marks the 15th anniversary of UN Security Council resolution 1325, a landmark legal and political framework acknowledging the importance of the participation of women and the inclusion of gender perspectives in all aspects of peace-building. UNSCR 1325 recognizes that exclusion from peace processes infringes women's rights.

Despite a broad commitment to gender-inclusive and women's-rights-based approaches to peace processes, the role of media in portraying peace process, particularly those involving or impacting women, is little understood.

On 4 December 2014 UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon published his synthesis report "On the Post-2015 Agenda." He wrote:

"We are at a historic crossroads, and the directions we take will determine whether we will succeed or fail in our promises. With our globalized economy and sophisticated technology, we can decide to end the age-old ills of extreme poverty and hunger. Or we can continue to degrade our planet and allow intolerable inequalities to sow bitterness and despair. Our ambition is to achieve sustainable development for all... Never before has the world had to face such a complex agenda in a single year. And this unique opportunity will not come again in our generation."

None of these noble aspirations will come about unless people are able to communicate their dreams, concerns, and needs – locally, nationally, regionally, globally. The obstacles are many: social, cultural, political, ideological, yet communication can help overcome them all unless it is silenced, censored, and repressed.

Communication clearly underpins sustainable development and requires equitable access to information and knowledge, to information and communication technologies, as well as plurality and diversity in the media. Without it, the post-2015 agenda may take a wrong turn. ■