

Establishing the Post-2015 Agenda: Process and Architecture

As the 2015 end date of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) approaches, the world has turned its attention to what the successor framework should be. So far, this has involved considerable analysis and consultation on the issues that the post-2015 agenda should prioritize. But alongside this, discussions are increasingly focused on the process for determining the post-2015 goals, and what the architecture that frames and governs the post-2015 agenda should be.

This policy brief outlines the processes underway for establishing the post-2015 framework and the architecture that looks set to frame it.

It draws on a longer NSI Report by Kate Higgins, [*Reflecting on the MDGs and Making Sense of the Post-2015 Development Agenda*](#).

Establishing the Post-2015 Framework: Process

The wheels for establishing the post-2015 framework are well and truly in motion. Currently, there are two processes running in parallel: the post-2015 development agenda process, which has been led by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and to date largely centred around the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda; and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) process, agreed at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and driven by an intergovernmental Open Working Group (OWG) on the SDGs.

The High-Level Panel, co-chaired by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono of Indonesia, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, and Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom, and comprising 27 representatives from government, the private sector, civil society, and academia, was tasked by the UN Secretary-General to “prepare a bold yet practical vision ... on a global post-2015 development agenda,” with the fight against poverty and support for sustainable development at its core. Following a number of meetings and consultations in 2012 and 2013, on May 30 2013 the panel published its report, *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development* (High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda 2013). This report serves as a key input into *A Life of Dignity for All: Accelerating Progress Towards the Millennium Development Goals and Advancing the United Nations Development Agenda Beyond 2015* (UNSG 2013), the Secretary-General’s report to the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) (which runs from September 2013 to September 2014) and the special event on achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and looking beyond 2015, to be convened in New York on 25 September 2013.

The OWG on the SDGs comprises 30 representatives nominated by UN Member States from the five UN regional groupings. Currently chaired by Hungary and Kenya, the group first met in March 2013. The program of work of the OWG is organized into two phases: the first, between March 2013 and February 2014, focuses on sectoral (e.g. cities, employment) and cross-cutting (e.g. inequality) themes, with time also set aside to consider implementation and partnerships. The second phase, from February to September 2014, will focus on preparing a report to the 68th session of the UNGA (OWG on SDGs 2013).

Both these processes have poverty eradication within the context of sustainable development as their overarching objectives. They also propose using a global goal framework to spur action and improve development outcomes. But they also reflect a split: the post-2015 process has largely been dominated by the development sector, while the sustainability sector has focused its efforts on the SDGs process.

Alongside these two processes, in September 2011 the UN Secretary General established the UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda to coordinate, in consultation with all stakeholders, UN system-wide preparations for the post-2015 agenda. The UN has undertaken its most comprehensive global consultation ever, convening 11 thematic consultations, country-level consultations in over 100 countries, and a global e-consultation to get feedback on what should come after the MDGs. A global survey for citizens, called MY World, is seeking to capture people's voices, priorities, and views on what the post-2015 priorities should be through online, mobile phone, and on-paper voting. The Sustainable

Development Solutions Network, led by Jeffery Sachs, has been tasked with highlighting the scientific knowledge necessary to underpin the post-2015 framework.

Beyond the UN system, a vast range of stakeholders are engaging in and seeking to influence the agenda. Civil society is mobilizing around the Beyond2015 campaign as well as several regional and issue-based platforms. Think tanks and research institutes, overwhelmingly from the North, but also from the South, are providing reams of analysis on what should come after the MDGs. Given the success of the MDGs as a mobilizing and organizing framework for international development, many stakeholders are engaging in substantial analysis, debate, and lobbying to influence a post-2015 framework in their favour.

While currently on parallel tracks, there is wide support for a single set of post-2015 global development goals.¹ There is concern that continuing with two separate processes, particularly with climate change negotiations intensifying in the lead up to their 2015 deadline, will result in a diluted outcome. How the processes will come together is not yet clear, but it is hoped that one process will inform a UN summit or meeting of the new high-level political forum (which was agreed at Rio+20, will replace the Commission on Sustainable Development and will meet for the first time in September 2013) in September 2015, when it is anticipated that UN Member States will adopt the global framework to succeed the MDGs.

¹ Both the High-Level Panel and the first interim report of the OWG on SDGs call for one set of post-2015 goals.

Establishing the Post-2015 Framework: Architecture

While the MDGs are global in nature, their focus is on poverty reduction and development progress in developing countries, where it is expected that the most significant changes will take place. The contribution of industrialized countries to these efforts is articulated through MDG 8, which has been criticized for lacking the quantitative targets and deadlines of the other goals. There is broad consensus that the post-2015 frameworks should retain the goals, targets and indicators format of the MDGs. But it is likely that the architecture that frames the post-2015 agenda will differ from the MDGs format in some ways.

Most significantly, it is proposed that the post-2015 agenda is **universal**. This would mean that contributions to and progress against the post-2015 goals would be monitored in all countries – not just the countries of the developing world. And rather than being made up of global goals and global targets, as is the case with the MDGs, it seems likely that the post-2015 framework will comprise global goals but country-level targets. Some of these targets may apply to all countries in the form of global minimum standards, including “zero” goals, as the High-Level Panel suggests. But most targets would vary from country to country, taking into account their different starting points and diverse needs. This approach would enable a more meaningful connection between global goals and domestic priorities, and make new targets more useful for national monitoring purposes. Box 1 provides an example a global minimum standard target and a variable country-level target.

Box 1: Universality in practice

Goal: End Poverty

Global minimum standard target: Bring the number of people living on less than \$1.25 a day to **zero**.

Variable country-level target: Reduce by **x%** the share of people living below their country’s 2015 national poverty line.

Source: High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2013, 30).

It has also been proposed, most significantly by the High-Level Panel, that progress against the goals be **monitored in a disaggregated way**. This would seek to incentivize countries to ensure that all relevant economic and social groups benefit from development progress and highlight where particular groups are excluded. To support this, the panel calls for a “**data revolution**”, to enhance statistical capacity and harness technological innovations to improve the availability and quality of data. This is required to enable the disaggregated monitoring of the broader range of issues that the post-2015 agenda will likely cover. It is also hoped that better data could ultimately enable governments and policy makers to better understand patterns of development progress, and make more informed decisions about how to allocate resources. Critically, it could also enhance transparency, and empower citizens to demand more from their governments (Pande and Elgin-Cossart).

The **institutional framework** required to support a broader, universal post-2015 framework still requires attention. The High-Level Panel recommends that countries establish their targets through participatory planning processes at the national level. At the global level, they suggest a “single locus of accountability” within the UN, a periodical high political level review of progress against the post-2015 goals and the production of a

Global Sustainable Development Outlook every one or two years. They also propose that monitoring, reporting and peer review is supported at the regional level (High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda 2013, 21-22). It is likely that the new high-level political forum will position itself to play a key role in this post-2015 landscape.

Finally, compared to the largely state-centric approach to delivering on the MDGs, it is likely that delivering the broader, more ambitious post-2015 agenda will require commitments from and partnerships between a **wider range of stakeholders**. This means actively engaging sub-national governments, businesses, local authorities, civil society and citizens' movements, international organizations, parliaments and the research and scientific community in developing the post-2015 framework and agreeing clear and constructive ways for them to contribute to the post-2015 goals.

Emerging Challenges

As intergovernmental negotiations on the post-2015 agenda intensify, a number of challenges relating to the process and *architecture* of the post-2015 framework will likely emerge.

Bringing the two processes together: While there is broad consensus that the post-2015 and the SDG processes need to be brought together, how this will happen is not yet clear.

Political viability of universality: Is a universal post-2015 framework politically viable? Will industrialized countries be prepared to commit to a universal framework where progress on sustainable development in their own countries and their contributions to sustainable development globally are scrutinized internationally? And will least-developed countries be prepared to see the

focus of global development goals shift away from poverty reduction in their countries? These questions demand analysis and early attention to ensure that countries buy-in to the approach well before September 2015.

Practicality of universality: How will the global goals/country-level targets framework work in practice? How will targets that are ambitious but realistic be identified? How will country-level progress be aggregated to track progress towards global goals? An early application of the proposed universal framework in a select number of diverse countries, to identify potential challenges in such an approach, is warranted.

Mobilizing stakeholders and holding them to account: If the post-2015 framework is to harness the efforts of a broader range of stakeholders in a meaningful way, identifying the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders beyond the state in delivering the post-2015 agenda, and accountability measures to monitor these contributions, requires attention.

References

- High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. 2013. *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate poverty and Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development*. United Nations: New York.
- Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). 2013. First Interim Report. New York: United Nations.
- Pande, Varad and Molly Elgin-Cossart. 2013. "Africa: Fight Poverty – With Data", *AllAfrica*, 10 July.
- United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG). 2013. *A Life of Dignity for All: Accelerating Progress Towards the Millennium Development Goals and Advancing the United Nations Development Agenda Beyond 2015. Report of the Secretary-General*. New York: United Nations.