

Post-2015 Agenda: New Priorities for a Changing Global Context

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were conceived in an era of relative stability and strong growth, when global power was more concentrated and international development was largely focused on more and better aid from rich countries and better policies in poor countries.

As the 2015 end date of the MDGs approaches, the world has turned its attention to what the successor framework should be. While many of the principles and priorities identified in the Millennium Declaration and MDGs remain relevant today, there is no doubt that the global context has changed considerably since 2000. For the post-MDG framework to be fit-for-purpose in 2015 and the decades beyond, this changing global context must be taken into account.

This policy brief examines how the global context has changed since the MDGs were conceived in 2000 and the implications of these changes for the priorities of the post-2015 agenda.

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

Changing Global Context

Much has changed since the Millennium Declaration was adopted at the United Nations General Assembly in 2000. The world's geopolitical landscape is more complicated now than it was at the start of the new millennium, with global power more dispersed and emerging economies playing more assertive roles on the global stage. The threat of climate change to global prosperity and security has resulted in broad consensus that the world needs to transition to more sustainable modes of living, yet action on this has been slow. The global financial crisis has demonstrated the vulnerability of the world to such shocks and triggered a loss of confidence in the economic orthodoxy of the pre-crisis era. Concerns about joblessness and inequality across the world have led to a heightened focus globally on job creation and the inclusivity of growth. Demographic shifts, a growing global middle class, increasing urbanization and new technologies are resulting in opportunities as well as challenges that the world has not grappled with before. Many of these issues are confronting *all* countries of the world – not just the poorest. And many of them are trans-boundary in nature, requiring collective and coordinated global action.

Alongside these shifts, the prominence of aid in global affairs has changed. While aid remains a critical resource for many low- and middle-income countries, other sources of finance, including taxation, remittances and investment, are of greater importance now than in 2000. This trend, coupled with fiscal pressures on donor aid budgets, has triggered a rethinking of the role of aid. In addition, the world is less state-centric than it was in 2000, with stakeholders beyond national governments, including the private sector, civil society, sub-national governments and individual citizens, participating more actively in global affairs.



Eradicating Extreme Poverty through Sustainable Development

With this changing global context as the backdrop, the overarching narrative that looks set to frame the post-2015 agenda is one that has two inter-connected objectives: the eradication of extreme poverty alongside the promotion of sustainable development. The High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2013, 27) has argued that this generation has the historic opportunity to *eradicate extreme poverty before 2030*. This, it is argued, needs to be done in the *context of sustainable development* which, according to the UN Secretary-General, is “enabled by the integration of economic growth, social justice and environmental stewardship” (UNSG 2013, 1). To do this, the High-Level Panel has proposed that five transformational shifts need to take place:

1. Leave no one behind;
2. Put sustainable development first;
3. Transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth;
4. Build peace and effective, open and accountable public institutions; and
5. Forge a new global partnership.

Beyond these overarching objectives and transformations, much attention is being paid to the particular issues that should constitute the post-2015 goals. Given the widely-held view that the issues prioritised in the MDGs received a heightened degree of financial resources and policy attention, stakeholders are actively lobbying for their issue to be given a prominent place in the post-2015 agenda.

Table 1 below tabulates issues that have been prioritised, and in some cases goals that have

been proposed, in a number of recent high profile reports and initiatives. Building on this, Figure 1 illustrates the prominence of issues across the reports and initiatives featured in Table 1 to show which issues are gaining traction.

A number of the issues that are gaining the most traction in these initiatives were goals in the MDGs: health; education; extreme poverty; gender equality; water and sanitation; and environmental protection. But there are some issues that were not prioritised in the MDGs that look likely to feature as post-2015 goals. Sustainability issues, such as energy, climate change and natural resource management, are getting comparatively more attention in the post-2015 deliberations. It also appears likely that job creation and employment will be a stronger focus in the post-2015 framework. The importance of governance and institutions for sustainable development, as well as the need to focus on peace and security, also look set to feature as priorities.

In addition to these issues, there is growing consensus that the post-2015 framework must do a better job at incentivizing action, and monitoring performance, on reducing inequality. Despite this, few of the higher profile post-2015 reports and initiatives have proposed a single goal on inequality. An alternative that has been proposed by the High-Level Panel is capturing inequality by monitoring progress on *all* goals in a disaggregated way. In practice, this would mean that targets would only be considered achieved if met for all relevant income and social groups. This, they argue, would ensure that the distributional nature of progress is monitored and that no one is left behind.

Table 1: Priority issues according to selected reports and initiatives

Report of the Secretary General on the MDGs and the UN development agenda beyond 2015 ¹	Report of High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda ²	Sustainable Development Solutions Network ³	MY World Survey ⁴	UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda ⁵	Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals ⁶
<p><i>Transformative and mutually reinforcing actions required to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eradicate poverty in all its forms • Tackle exclusion and inequality • Empower women and girls • Provide quality education and lifelong learning • Improve health • Address climate change • Address environmental challenges • Promote inclusive and sustainable growth and decent employment • End hunger and malnutrition • Address demographic challenges • Enhance the positive contribution of migrants • Meet the challenges of urbanization • Build peace and effective governance based on the rule of law and sound institutions • Foster a renewed global partnership 	<p><i>Illustrative goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End poverty • Empower girls and women and achieve gender equality • Provide quality education and lifelong learning • Ensure healthy lives • Ensure food security and good nutrition • Achieve universal access to water and sanitation • Secure sustainable energy • Create jobs, sustainable livelihoods, and equitable growth • Manage natural resource assets sustainably • Ensure good governance and effective institutions • Ensure stable and peaceful societies • Create a global enabling environment and catalyse long-term finance 	<p><i>Goals proposed for discussion:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End extreme poverty including hunger • Achieve development within planetary boundaries • Ensure effective learning for all children and youth for life and livelihood • Achieve health and well-being at all ages • Improve agricultural systems and raise rural prosperity • Empower inclusive, productive, and resilient cities • Curb human-induced climate change and ensure green energy for all • Secure ecosystem services, biodiversity, and good management of natural resources • Transform governance for sustainable development 	<p><i>MY World priorities to rank:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equality between men and women • Affordable and nutritious food • A good education • Better job opportunities • Better health care • Support for people who cannot work • Reliable energy at home • Access to clean water and sanitation • Protecting forests, rivers, and oceans • Action on climate change • An honest and responsive government • Protection against crime and violence • Phone and internet access • Freedom from discrimination and persecution • Better transport and roads • Political freedoms 	<p><i>Issues identified in integrated post-2015 framework:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eradicating income poverty and hunger • Reducing inequalities • Ensuring decent work and productive employment • Adequate nutrition for all • Quality education for all • Reduced mortality and morbidity • Gender equality • Universal access to clean water and sanitation • Freedom from violence, conflict, and abuse • Conflict-free access to natural resources • Protection of biodiversity • Stable climate • Resilience to natural hazards 	<p><i>Issues identified as priorities in first meeting of OWG:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eradication of poverty and hunger • Employment and decent jobs • Sustainable consumption and production • Gender equality and empowerment of women • Access to and good management of the essentials of human well-being, such as food, water, health, and energy

¹ UNSG (2013, 15).

² High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2013).

³ Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2013).

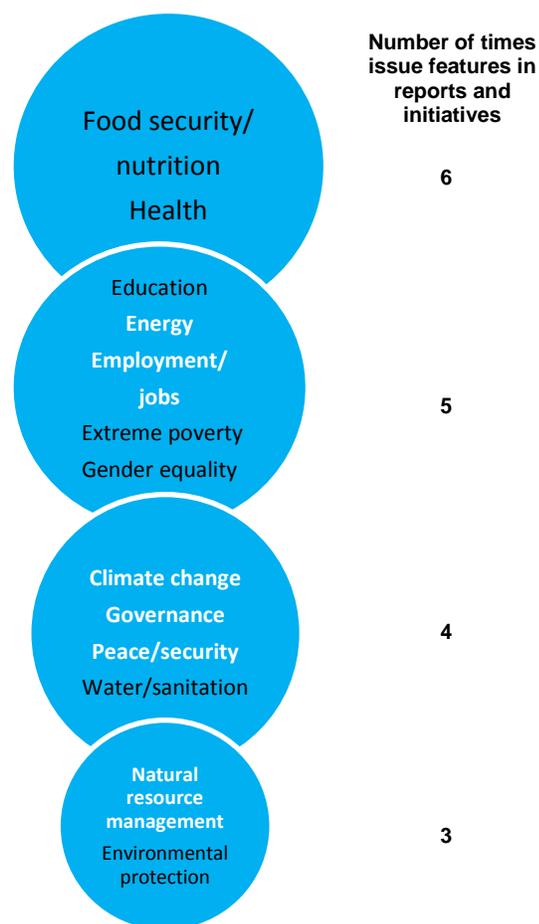
⁴ United Nations (2013).

⁵ UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda (2012).

⁶ International Institute on Sustainable Development (2013).



Figure 1: Post-2015 priorities⁷



Emerging challenges

As inter-governmental negotiations on the post-2015 intensify, a number of policy challenges are likely to emerge.

One key challenge will be **balancing the need to prioritize a limited set of goals with expectations that a broader range of issues will make up the post-2015**

⁷ Issues that feature once or twice across these documents are: agriculture; civil and political rights; connectivity; demographic shifts; disaster resilience; freedom from discrimination/persecution; global enabling environment/finance; inequality; migration; planetary boundaries; transport; social protection; sustainable cities/urbanization; and sustainable consumption and production.

framework. Given that the simple and limited nature of the MDGs has been hailed as one of their best attributes, the post-2015 framework should not be overburdened with too many goals and priorities. The challenge will be identifying and including the issues that will benefit most from inclusion in a global framework.

Balancing the norm-setting of global goals with demands for robust data and measurement will also likely be a challenge.

The time is ripe for drilling down on priorities and identifying the particular targets and indicators that should accompany the post-2015 goals. But efforts on measurement will need to be balanced with the important norm-setting role that global goals can play as signals of global and collective development priorities. Too much focus on data robustness will risk excluding important issues and certain segments of populations that require serious policy attention. At the same time, the post-2015 framework should be seen as an opportunity to improve data capacity and quality around specific issues that the world deems as priorities. In short, striking the balance between norm-setting and measurement will not be easy and will likely result in trade-offs on both sides.

References

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