



The global development agenda beyond 2015: Sustainable Development Goals

Since 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have set the benchmark for global development policy. 2015 will mark the deadline for their achievement. Although progress has been made, many targets have not been met and there is intensive debate over what should replace the MDGs thereafter. Do we need a new set of global development goals? Should they 'only' be for the poorest? Or should they address the challenges that will face the eight billion people, both rich and poor, who will be sharing the earth come 2030?

Any answer is potentially contentious. The world was a relatively simpler place in 2000: 9/11 highlighted the danger posed by fragile and failed states; the financial crisis demonstrated our vulnerability to risks that transcend national borders; globalization – its benefits apart – has increased the complexity of challenges facing the world. And the impressive economic and political rise of China, India, Russia, Brazil and other emerging economies is expanding the circle of nations that must be included in creating a prosperous and stable global order.

Striking agreement for a renewed 'compact' among nations to end poverty – through a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for all – is a test-case for whether the world's governments, businesses and other stakeholders can converge around the common purpose of tackling long-term challenges.

I hope you enjoy reading the newsletter and thank you for your continued support.

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The Millennium Development Goals

At the 8th plenary meeting of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in September 2000, world leaders set out a shared vision for a global development path based on the fundamental values of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility – the United Nations Millennium Declaration. For the first time in human history, all Heads of State and Government attending the UN General Assembly explicitly supported fundamental values including:

- *Freedom* from hunger and from the fear of violence, oppression or injustice based on democratic and participatory governance.
- *Equity* of opportunity for individuals and nations, with particular emphasis on equal rights and opportunities for women and men.
- *Solidarity*, in the sense that those who benefit least deserve help from those who benefit most, in accordance with basic principles of equity and social justice.
- *Tolerance* with regard to issues like diversity of belief, culture and language, actively promoting a culture of peace and dialogue.
- *Respect for nature*, reducing the damage being done to the environment by humans.
- *Shared responsibility* for managing worldwide economic and social development, as well as threats to international peace and security.

Against this background, the Millennium Summit achieved unprecedented global agreement on key measures to reduce poverty by accepting eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with an overall target date of 2015. The eight goals encompassed targets to increase incomes; reduce hunger; achieve universal primary education; eliminate gender inequality; reduce maternal and child mortality; reverse the spread of HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria; reverse the loss of natural resources and biodiversity; improve access to water, sanitation and good housing; and establish effective global

partnerships. According to the UNDP Human Development Report 2003, this marked the first global development vision combining global political endorsement with a clear focus on the world's poor people.

Successes and shortfalls: what we can learn from the MDGs

With three years yet to run, the MDGs have already had notable success. In particular, the evidence to date suggests the MDGs have made four important positive contributions:

1. Encouraging global political consensus,
2. Providing a focus for advocacy,
3. Improving the targeting and flow of aid, and
4. Improving the monitoring of development projects.

In a 2005 UN Development Group survey of 118 countries, 86% had reportedly acted in response to the MDGs. The World Health Organization (WHO) has found individual MDGs have benefited from increased advocacy, such as those to reduce poverty (MDG 1) and infectious diseases (MDG 6). Similarly, relatively neglected agendas such as child survival (MDG 4) and gender (MDG 3) have been reinvigorated. The MDGs are thought to have generally improved the targeting and flow of aid and other investments: according to Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) figures, between 2000 – when the Millennium Declaration was adopted – and 2010, aid to developing countries (ODA) rose by 63% reaching USD 133.5 billion in 2011.

However, the MDGs have also encountered a range of common challenges associated with their conceptualization and execution at three levels: goals, targets and indicators. The very specific nature of some of the goals leaves considerable gaps in coverage and fails to capitalize on synergies that could arise in their implementation – in particular between education, health, poverty and gender. In some cases, targets present a measure of goal achievement that is too narrow, or might not identify a clear

means of delivery. Other challenges encountered with several MDGs include a lack of clear ownership and leadership internationally and nationally – and a notable problem with equity. Issues of equity arise because many goals target attainment of a specific minimum standard, e.g., of income, education, or maternal and child survival. To lift people above this threshold might mean focus is placed on those requiring least effort, neglecting groups which – for geographical, ethnic, or other reasons – are more difficult to reach, thereby increasing inequity.

Consequently, under the MDGs, progress in human development has not happened in all countries, nor has it reached all poor people within these countries. The most vulnerable populations are still missing out on many dimensions and the aggregate ‘success data’ conceal important intra-national and regional differences. So whereas the World Bank finds the number of poor living on less than USD 1.25 a day decreased from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 1.3 billion in 2008, this aggregate progress measurable in absolute terms is mostly due to the enormous economic development of China and the number of people living in absolute poverty in sub-Saharan Africa actually increased during this time. Three

groups in particular, sometimes called the ‘traditional poor’ – encompassing orphans, people with disabilities and elderly people who share similar livelihood strategies – have been found to be relatively disadvantaged, highlighting an ongoing need for efforts targeting these groups.

In the three remaining years to 2015, some countries will achieve all or most MDGs; others will achieve few. Among the reasons for the shortfalls are the structural complexity of deep-rooted poverty, deficits in good governance, and the failure of rich countries to deliver on their promises to provide development assistance.

The expiry of the MDGs offers an opportunity to address some of the weaknesses of the MDG approach in delivering against the equitable growth and human rights-based development aims of the Millennium Declaration. Rather than completely reformulate the existing goals, we need to adapt them for industrial countries (e.g. with regard to their ecological footprint), and underpin them with effective principles that can serve in monitoring and evaluating the significance, effectiveness and efficacy of development initiatives.



Beyond the MDGs

Thanks to the MDGs, there is already a foundation of global consensus that efforts to achieve a world with greater prosperity, equity, freedom and peace – without compromising the opportunities of future generations – should continue to 2015 and beyond:

- In the *Outcome document* of the UN Summit of September 2010, Heads of State and Government request the UN Secretary-General to recommend further steps to advance the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015. A post-2015 agreement is already a growing agenda for Heads of State and Government, along with the private sector, foundations, international organizations, civil society and research organizations.
- On July 31st 2012, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed a High-Level Panel with three co-chairs to advise him on the post-2015 agenda: President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono of Indonesia, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, and Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom.
- On August 9th 2012, the UN Secretary-General established a UN System Task Team to coordinate and support the work of the High-Level Panel. He appointed Prof. Jeffrey Sachs (Earth Institute of Columbia University and Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on the MDGs) to lead a new “Sustainable Development Solutions Network.” Prof. Sachs appointed Prof. Dr. Klaus M. Leisinger (who is also a member of the Global Compact LEAD Initiative steering committee) to lead the Corporate Responsibility workstream of this global network.
- The Global Compact LEAD Initiative is expected to make a significant contribution to the work and aspirations of other UN Agencies, funds and programs by inspiring action in support of broader UN goals and issues, and brokering mutually beneficial relations for engagement and partnership between LEAD members and relevant UN entities.

What is up for debate is the form and focus these post-2015 efforts should take. To arrive at a meaningful post-2015 agreement, it is essential we learn from the past and make the right plans for the future that are politically acceptable, effective in reducing poverty and successful in removing obstacles to sustainable human development. Future goals should be built on a shared vision of development – not on the bundling together of a set of independent development targets. Development is a complex and dynamic process involving sustainable and equitable access to improved wellbeing, achieved through higher and more secure incomes for the world’s poor, as well as expansion of access to services that deliver the different elements of wellbeing. These elements can be defined in many ways, and include those addressed by the MDGs.

What we know for certain is that the scale of effort required to sustainably resolve the global development challenge is immense:

- More than 1.2 billion people live under the USD 1.25 per day poverty line and nearly 2.4 billion must do so on USD 2 or less.
- Socio-economic inequalities continue to widen within most countries.
- With the world population above 7 billion today (projected to reach 10 billion by 2060) and a current annual GDP of USD 70 trillion, human impact on the environment has reached dangerous levels and is likely to grow. The unsustainable consumption and production patterns of a small, but growing minority of the world’s population are resulting in ecological impacts considered beyond the earth’s carrying capacity.

While the remit of the MDGs will continue to be relevant after 2015, a modified development concept supported by new Sustainable Development Goals is therefore necessary to set the world on a sustainable development path – but this will depend on whether the political will to address global issues beyond poverty alleviation can be mobilized. The debate around what future Sustainable Development Goals should be and how responsibility for achieving them should be shared is likely to be intensely political as well as scientific and factual.



A multi-stakeholder approach based on five pillars

The basic objective of a shared sustainable development vision ought to be to enable all people to satisfy their needs in a way that leaves future generations' opportunities and freedom of choice equal to the present generation. This is the paradigm developed by the Brundtland Commission (Our Common Future), which continues to enjoy broad political and academic support today.

In preparation for the post-2015 MDG era, substantial emphasis must be placed on cross-country, multi-stakeholder collaboration to analyze common problems and learn from each other's experiences. Such a global network will accelerate joint learning and help to overcome the compartmentalization of technical and policy work by promoting integrated systems approaches to address the complex economic, social and environmental challenges confronting governments. As part of this network, businesses – particularly those operating with cutting-edge technologies – will work alongside scientists, policy analysts and community leaders to understand and anticipate new opportunities to address economic, social and environmental constraints.

To map a path to future Sustainable Development Goals, consensus must be built around five crucial pillars, which are not new, but go to the core of the existing MDGs:

- **Economic development** is needed to sustain momentum in the development agenda and should ensure synergy between its interlinked components – namely human, social, and environmental development.
- Institutional support mechanisms should be established to ensure **social inclusion**, recognizing its complex and local nature, and addressing all communities while taking a deliberately pro-poor approach.
- **Environmental sustainability** is especially critical to the livelihoods of the poor, as is a clear commitment to focusing on sustainable productivity growth.
- A broad development agenda arising from this process should be agreed internationally, but developed locally, to ensure ownership of goals and national, regional and global monitoring. This requires **good governance**.
- This agenda should be based on strong acknowledgement of **global obligation** supported by effective international institutional frameworks.

These five elements are interrelated and mutually interdependent; progress in one dimension is not achievable without progress in the other. Of course, there are many trade-offs between them, and there is no one-size-fits-all solution that suits all countries. But while different social, economic and ecological conditions may prevail at country level, consensus on these core pillars should be achievable.

Desiderata for the SDG process

Preliminary evaluation of the experiences and lessons learned from the MDG process points to organizing the Sustainable Development Goals process as a normative framework with the following characteristics:

1. Definition of a *small number of significant, clear, ambitious yet feasible goals* to facilitate identification and advocacy by people all over the world. The goals must be global in reach and organized around the five pillars of *economy, society, environment, governance and global commitment*. Overloading the agenda would be counterproductive.
2. Definition of *quantified, measurable goals as well as intermediate milestones*. There must be a target date for the SDGs allowing sufficient time for action (e.g. 2030 or 2040) – as we are currently facing complex changes – as well as intermediate milestones to collect timely and accurate information, measure and discuss progress, identify obstacles and decide on necessary modifications at regular intervals (e.g. 3-5 years).
3. Appreciation of *differences in underlying conditions and national capacity*, reflected in *differentiation of national implementation priorities and programs* to allow for differing needs and abilities of states. Specific national goals should be set by local authorities, using global goals as a reference.
4. Given the remaining shortfalls in poverty alleviation – with more than one billion people still living on less than one Euro a day – the *focus on poverty eradication* must be maintained.
5. ‘Green growth’ will be of crucial importance in addressing issues resulting from *unsustainable economic, social and environmental patterns* (e.g. widening inequalities, climate change as well as consumption of non-renewable resources).
6. The simplified view that the MDGs can be attained wherever economic growth is rapid, foreign aid substantial and governance good underestimates the complexity of the poverty system: to reduce complexity, *the underlying axiomatic assumptions of different actors* need to be openly shared and discussed.
7. SDG-related problems should *not be approached with an ‘either market or government’* mindset: an optimal mix of market solutions and state interventions is required.
8. Making the SDG process *as inclusive as possible* by inviting the private sector to participate is not only important to build ownership, but also to leverage managerial expertise and business processes. As the private sector is the repository of key technologies and organizational management capacity, its role is pivotal. Without a global leadership business community, there will be no sustainable development.
9. *International development resources* must be twinned with proper use of domestic resources, allowing international development cooperation to focus on:
 - Expanding access and facilitating the adoption of crucial technologies for the world’s poorest (ICT, health technologies, alternative energy production, high yielding and robust food crop varieties),
 - Promoting the transfer of green technologies, particularly to emerging countries, and
 - Supporting investment in infrastructure (e.g. health), particularly in remote rural areas.
10. *Monitoring and benchmarking* are crucial along with targeted research.

11. *Building on existing knowledge of successful strategies* to generate strategic options, identify conditions for success, identify barriers, and create simple rules for managing strategic bottlenecks.
12. *Creating terms of reference* and defining concrete tasks for all 28 UN institutions to minimize duplication and create optimal synergy.

If we understand development to be the result of complex interactions between interdependent economic, social, ecological, cultural, political and legal factors (as it is conceived by the UN System Task team on the post-2015 UN Development Agenda), there can be no 'one-size-fits-all' approach. Instead what is needed is guidance on priority-setting at international, national and sub-national levels. Given today's immense global economic, social and ecological interdependence, a new paradigm is needed that emphasizes our common interest on a planet with limited resources – one that does not maximize short-term advantages for a few, to the detriment of the vital long-term interests of the many. The Millennium Declaration – with its values and principles and the courage to formulate concrete, quantified, time-bound and achievable goals – should therefore be the foundation for the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals process.



The role of enlightened business

Achieving progress towards sustainable development will be a multi-disciplinary, multi-sector and therefore multi-stakeholder affair: all societal actors will have to contribute their share, business included. As well as competing with integrity – i.e. conducting business in a responsible manner, in line with international norms such as those underlying the corporate responsibility platform of the Global Compact – companies must actively seek to become 'part of the solution.' Rather than merely exercising their 'license to operate,' leading brands and corporations of the future must move beyond operational imperatives and social add-ons to establish their 'license to lead.'

Such thinking is encouraged by the Global Compact *Blueprint for Corporate Sustainability Leadership*, which expands on the original ten principles of the UNGC to urge companies to take "action in support of broader UN Goals and Issues," such as helping to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and to "undertake more outward-oriented actions to increase their positive impacts in society," for example through *strategic social investments* and *corporate philanthropy*.

The business sector will never be a one-stop-shop for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, but corporate resources, skills, experience and the 'business mind-set' will be helpful in finding solutions. The private sector is a source of dynamic innovation and a repository of key technologies to overcome the technical challenges of sustainability: this is no substitute for changed consumption and production patterns, but it will help mitigate the transition.

While the financial, scientific and technological components of sustainable development solutions are immensely important, a technocratic approach will not be sufficient to achieve a future we all want. What is equally essential is an ethical underpinning: 'sustainable development' is not only a concept with economic, social, ecological and governance elements, it is a fundamental vision of a just and fair world where people act in a legitimate way and cooperate to honor human dignity and human rights, freedom, justice, peace and the preservation of creation on a global level.

The Millennium Development Goals process has helped to raise global consciousness about poverty, to communicate complex development issues to a wider audience, as well as to make available and focus resources. The Sustainable Development Goals process can do the same – and in addition, contribute to focusing and measuring progress against the sustainable development agenda. This has to be a shared responsibility and represents a unique opportunity for all societal forces to work together in good faith to develop a new generation of solutions to the highly complex challenges facing humanity in the 21st century.

