



## The post-2015 development goals

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In 2000, the global community signed up to the Millennium Development Goals, a set of international goals for human development. As the 2015 deadline for these goals approaches, attention has turned to what will replace them. In July 2012, the UN Secretary-General established a High-level Panel (HLP) to explore the 'Post-2015 Development Agenda'. UK Prime Minister David Cameron co-chaired this process.

The HLP presented its report on the nature of the post-2015 development framework in June 2013. Their findings have been taken up by an Open Working Group, which has been tasked with integrating the MDG successor goals with a separate process to establish a set of 'Sustainable Development Goals' based on the 'Rio Principles' of protecting the integrity of the global environmental and developmental system. A UN System Task Team, and a series of public consultations, are also assessing what should be included within the post-2015 framework.

On 2 June 2014, the Open Working Group published a 'zero draft' of 17 new goals. Reactions to the draft have centred on the degree to which they learn from mistakes made with the MDGs, and how effectively they grapple with new and emerging global challenges that have arisen since the MDGs were formulated in 2000 (for example, urbanisation, the global financial crisis, and climate change).

Formal inter-governmental negotiations on the draft goals will be launched at the beginning of the 69<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly in September 2014. Key issues for the remaining negotiations include: which draft goals remain in the final draft, and what needs still to be added; the inclusion of civil society within the process; striking the balance between making the goals sufficiently universal; ensuring consistency with national priorities and targets; and formulating an effective monitoring process for the goals.

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# **1 The process towards creating the post-2015 goals**

## **1.1 The Millennium Declaration**

In 2000, in an attempt to create a framework of globally-agreed development targets, the international community signed the Millennium Declaration. This broad-based document was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) on 8 September 2000. The key components of the Millennium Declaration were as follows:

- A declaration of fundamental values, including freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature, and shared responsibility.
- Sections on the following topics:
  - Peace, security and disarmament
  - Development and poverty eradication
  - Protecting our common environment
  - Human rights, democracy and good governance
  - Protecting the vulnerable
  - Meeting the special needs of Africa
  - Strengthening the United Nations

Following the adoption of the Millennium Declaration, the then-Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, presented a report to the General Assembly entitled: “Road map towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration.” As part of this report, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were unveiled.

## **1.2 The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**

The MDG framework unveiled in 2001 comprised eight goals, as follows:

- MDG 1 – Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- MDG 2 – Achieve universal primary education
- MDG 3 – Promote gender equality and empower women
- MDG 4 – Reduce child mortality
- MDG 5 – Improve maternal health
- MDG 6 – Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- MDG 7 – Ensure environmental sustainability
- MDG 8 – Develop a global partnership for development

Each of these goals was broken down into a number of targets, which generally required the achievement of a certain degree of progress by a specified date (generally 2015). Three further sets of targets and indicators were issued over the following decade, but the basic goals remained unchanged.

## **1.3 Progress on the MDGs**

Following the MDGs’ establishment, data monitoring took place at the country level, with the UN website tracking progress against each indicator on a country-by-country basis. A number of countries used a modified version of the MDG framework for their own monitoring purposes. 15 countries were found to have added, expanded or modified targets, whilst 25 had added, expanded or modified indicators. Ten countries had gone so far as to add or modify goals – for example, by expanding MDG 2 to include post-primary education (Armenia, Cambodia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan); or by including an additional goal on good governance or anti-corruption (Albania, Iraq, Mongolia).

Progress against the MDGs was reviewed at various international summits, including the 2005 World Summit; the 2008 High Level Event on the MDGs; and the 2010 MDG Review Summit. [The latest 2013 figures](#) show that several goals are close to being met: the MDG1 target to reduce extreme poverty by half is on-track (thanks in large part to China's success in pulling millions of its population out of poverty); there has been substantial progress towards the MDG3 target seeking gender equality in education; and the MDG7 target seeking to halve the proportion of the population without access to drinking water is also within sight.

However, progress towards meeting the other goals has been patchy, at best. A number will be missed entirely: the goal of reducing maternal mortality by three-quarters is unlikely to be met in Africa and much of Asia, while the MDG to reduce the mortality of children aged under-five by two-thirds is unlikely to be achieved in sub-Saharan Africa, southern Asia and Oceania. The goal to halve the proportion of the population without access to basic sanitation is considerably off-track in sub-Saharan Africa, east Asia and Oceania.

#### **1.4 The verdict on the MDGs**

So with a number of MDG aspirations thwarted, what is the balance of opinion on the framework? Early criticism emerged during the goals' formulation, with the process criticised by NGOs for being non-inclusive of those directly affected by poverty and injustice – a weakness acknowledged by those involved within the UN at the time. And whilst the goals themselves also had their detractors – particularly those identifying 'missing' targets, such as violence against women, and employment – development experts broadly agree that the Goals provided a unifying framework that catalysed real progress in many regions. Having a set of focal points around which to gather efforts, with timescales attached, seems to have been an experiment that has worked – even if not all the goals have been reached.

#### **1.5 The High Level Panel**

As 2015 – the deadline for most MDGs – has approached, thoughts have turned to what might replace the Goals. In July 2012, the UN Secretary-General established a High-level Panel of Eminent Persons (HLP) to explore the 'Post-2015 Development Agenda', or what might replace the MDGs following their expiry in 2015. This panel was co-chaired by UK Prime Minister David Cameron, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia, and President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono of Indonesia.

The HLP presented its report on the nature of the post-2015 development framework in June 2013. Its findings are discussed below. In response to the report, the Secretary-General published a report of his own in July 2013 on the post-2015 agenda, "A Life of Dignity for All - Accelerating progress towards the MDGs and advancing the UN development agenda beyond 2015". He acknowledged the contribution of the HLP's report.

#### **1.6 The 'Sustainable Development Goals' process**

Simultaneously, efforts have been underway to establish a set of 'Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs). In 1992, eight years before the MDGs were launched, the UN held a major conference on the subject in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>1</sup> In June 2012, on the twentieth anniversary of that conference, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20) took place. At this conference, separately from the post-2015 process outlined above, it was agreed to

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), Earth Summit, *United Nations: Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform*, [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)

establish SDGs. The Rio+20 'outcome document' stated that an Open Working Group would be created with a view to drawing up the SDGs.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.7 The Open Working Group

The Rio+20 outcome document specified that the Open Working Group (OWG) would consist of thirty geographically representative members (nominated by UN Member States via the five UN Regional Groups). The OWG was established in January 2013. Each seat in the Group is shared by 1-4 Member States. These country teams were able to decide themselves how they would be represented in the OWG meetings. The OWG is co-chaired by Kenya (H.E. Mr. Macharia Kamau) and Hungary (H.E. Mr. Csaba Körösi).

The OWG is scheduled to report back to the UN General Assembly during its 68th session (with a final deadline of September 2014). The report will contain proposed SDGs for consideration and eventual adoption by Member States in 2015. It has held regular thematic sessions from March 2013 to June 2013, including pre-meetings with civil society representatives before every OWG session day.

The Group identified **16 focus areas** ranging from poverty reduction, to health, education, gender, corruption, governance, economic issues and issues of sustainability and climate change. On June 2, 2014, the OWG Co-Chairs released the '**zero draft**' of goals and targets. This draft puts forward 17 goals, with detailed sub-targets attached (see Section 2 below for analysis).

### 1.8 Other post-2015 initiatives

There are two other processes engaged in drawing up the post-2015 framework:

#### ***UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda***

Established by the UN Secretary-General in January 2012, the Task Team is made up of more than 60 UN agencies and international organisations. Co-chaired by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme, the Task Team supports the process by providing analytical thinking and inputs to the post-2015 process.

#### ***UN public consultations on the post-2015 process***

These include:

- **50–100 country consultations** in developing countries, led by UN Development Group (UNDG) teams in each participating countries. These reported in March 2013. A wide range of stakeholders were consulted, including NGOs, universities and research institutions, private sector entities, interest groups, and political decision-makers.
- **Nine thematic consultations**, led by the relevant UN agency, on: Inequality; Health; Education; Growth and employment; Environmental sustainability; Food security and nutrition; Governance; Conflict and fragility; and Population dynamics.<sup>3</sup> These reported in June 2013).

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<sup>2</sup> 'The Future We Want', UN Resolution A/RES/66/288, 27 July 2012, www.un.org

<sup>3</sup> ONE (Ben Leo with Khai Hoan Tram), 'What does the world really want from the next global development goals: Ensuring that the world's poor define the post-2015 framework,' p.3.

- **My World 2015**, a global UN-led survey aiming to capture public opinions on which six of 16 possible issues they think would make the most difference to their lives.

## 1.9 Office of the UN Secretary-General

Once the bodies and processes outlined above have all reported—most have a deadline of summer 2014—the UN Secretary-General will prepare his own report which, together with the report of the High-Level Panel, will form the basis of intergovernmental negotiations in late 2014 and during 2015.<sup>4</sup> The final set of goals will then be formally agreed by the UN General Assembly in 2015, and will hopefully become a major focus of global attention and resources over the following 15 years.<sup>5</sup>

The UN Secretary-General appointed Amina Mohammed of Nigeria in 2012 as his [Special Adviser on Post-2015 Development Planning](#). She served as an ex-officio member of the High-level Panel and has worked closely with the OWG.

## 2 What kind of framework?

### 2.1 One common framework?

The decision to establish the SDGs in 2012 led to global soul-searching about whether the SDGs on the one hand, and the MDG successor goals on the other, were the same thing. Some argued that separating the agendas might be more productive, and might enable a sharper focus on the respective agendas of poverty eradication, and sustainable development (with its attendant focus on the environment).<sup>6</sup>

However, a general consensus emerged within the UN post-2015 secretariat, and within the development community more widely, that the end result should be one combined set of global goals, covering both post-2015 and sustainability agendas. As a result, the OWG has sought to create a set of goals that integrates the two agendas of poverty reduction and environmental sustainability.

### 2.2 Goals or benchmarks?

Considerable time has been spent over the past year in deciding whether to set goals – seen by some as too ‘outcome’ related - or whether instead to use annual benchmarks that are much more related to processes.<sup>7</sup> A wide range of organisations – including the Overseas Development Institute, ONE and Oxfam GB – have argued that one of the great strengths of the original MDG framework was the set of simple, focused and timebound goals at its core.<sup>8</sup> They argue that these provided clear yardsticks by which the global community could measure progress.

Others believe that goals necessarily involve achieving national averages which, by design, leave half of those affected below the average. They argue that setting goals will only make sense if they are applied at the sub-national level, i.e. district or municipality level, in order to focus efforts on the most neglected and marginalised.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/about/mdg.shtml>

<sup>5</sup> [http://mobile.nytimes.com/2014/05/07/business/economy/at-the-un-a-free-for-all-on-setting-global-goals.html?\\_r=0&referrer=](http://mobile.nytimes.com/2014/05/07/business/economy/at-the-un-a-free-for-all-on-setting-global-goals.html?_r=0&referrer=)

<sup>6</sup> As noted by Claire Melamed in her written evidence to the International Development Committee’s Post-2015 inquiry (2013) <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmintdev/657/657vw38.htm>

<sup>7</sup> ‘Key framing questions to guide the HLP’s work and consultations’, <http://post2015.org/about/>

<sup>8</sup> Written evidence to the [International Development Committee’s Post-2015 inquiry \(2013\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> ‘Key framing questions to guide the HLP’s work and consultations’, <http://post2015.org/about/>

### 2.3 The Open Working Group's draft list of goals

The publication of the Open Working Group's 'zero draft' (published on 2 June 2014), with its list of 17 goals, seems to have answered this debate and eschewed the idea of using benchmarks. The list draws on the targets recommended in the report of the [High Level Panel Report](#), which set out the five key “transformational shifts” needed to catalyse human development:

- **Leave no-one behind:** a shift from reducing to ending extreme poverty, including amongst the most marginalised (disabled people; ethnic minorities, women and girls; remote communities);
- **Put sustainable development at the core:** integrating efforts to tackle climate change and environmental degradation within the goals;
- **Transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth:** harnessing innovation, technology and the private sector;
- **Build peace and effective, open and accountable institutions for all:** boosting peace, accountability and good governance; and
- **Forge a new global partnership:** “A new partnership should be based on a common understanding of our shared humanity [...] governments but also others: people living in poverty, those with disabilities, women, civil society and indigenous and local communities, traditionally marginalised groups, multilateral institutions, local and national government, the business community, academia and private philanthropy.”

These core elements are clearly discernable within the OWG's zero draft list of goals, as is the original MDG framework. However, the OWG's list is more ambitious in scale and scope, with seventeen – as opposed to eight – goals and some 140 specific sub-targets. As well as being more numerous than the eight MDGs, there are other notable differences to the MDGs:

- New deadlines have been set, with many goals set to reach their target by 2030 (notably the goal to eradicate poverty by 2030);
- Hunger and poverty are separated in this draft so that each is a standalone goal;
- The new goals tend to be ‘zero targets’ rather than percentage reductions (ie. ‘End poverty in all its forms everywhere’ rather than MDG 1's aspiration to halve poverty);
- New issues are addressed, notably: access to energy services, economic growth; industrialisation; inequality; consumption and production patterns; climate change; governance; marine resources, oceans and seas.
- A range of health-related issues – maternal, newborn and child health; infectious, and non-communicable diseases; life expectancy; universal health coverage; sexual and reproductive health; access to medicines; air pollution – are included in one ‘supergoal’ to “attain healthy life for all ages”; and
- The new goals reflect changes in the world since the MDGs were drawn up in 2000. For example, the world now has more people living in urban than rural settings – hence the enhanced emphasis on urban settlements. Private investment flows have grown, and now dwarf aid flows – hence the focus on economic growth. Scientific evidence of the growing threat of climate change has mounted. This is reflected



across a number of goals, and some environmental issues - notably biodiversity loss and access to secure water and sanitation - which were both part of MDG7, are now standalone goals.<sup>10</sup>

## 2.4 Reaction to the draft goals

The 'Beyond 2015' coalition of NGOs welcomed the OWG's list of goals, but [expressed a number of reservations](#):

- The decision to integrate equality issues across several goals, rather than have a standalone goal;
- The lack of a "genuine human rights" approach;
- A perceived overemphasis on economic growth;
- The lack of climate change targets with the economic growth goal; and
- An insufficient emphasis on the universality of the goals.

A further draft from the OWG is yet to come, and the final iteration of what it should include will continue to be hotly-debated. The growing literature on the subject includes the OECD's [Development Co-operation Report 2013: Ending Poverty](#) which says the world needs to adapt to new challenges and move beyond the focus on economic growth, which – while crucial – is insufficient by itself to take 1.2 billion people out of poverty. [Another set of organisations](#) are calling for a standalone goal on eliminating extreme economic inequality. Other studies still say that the priority is tackling gender inequality (see case study, below).

The International Rescue Committee's David Miliband [has argued](#) that a set of humanitarian goals should be established. These, he argues, could help tackle four fundamental issues: 1) help provide an agreed focus for humanitarian efforts; 2) align diverse practical efforts on the ground in response to conflict and disaster; 3) establish accountability in and for the humanitarian system; 4) rally public opinion.

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<sup>10</sup> HLP report, [Executive Summary](#)



### **Case study: Gender equality and the post-2015 goals**

How to position gender equality within the post-2015 framework has become a major topic of discussion. The debate is representative of simultaneous deliberations about the inclusion of other key policy issues (eg. climate change; economic growth; disability) within the goals.

Discussions have centred on whether to have one goal solely devoted to gender equality (similar to MDG 3), and/or whether or not gender equality should be mainstreamed across all the other goals. The conclusion has been to follow a twin-track approach seeking both. The zero draft of goals includes a much-anticipated standalone goal seeking **to attain gender equality, empower women and girls everywhere**. This includes 11 sub-targets, which seek, amongst other things: the elimination of violence against women and girls, and of harmful practices including early marriage and FGM; equal access to education and work; equal access to, control and ownership of assets, resources, essential services and infrastructure; participation in decision-making; universal access to sexual and reproductive health; and the full engagement of men and boys in efforts to promote gender equality.

Gender activists [have welcomed](#) the “substantial evolution” from the way gender equality was addressed in the MDGs. The twin-track approach, they believe, demonstrates an “understanding of the multidimensional and structural issues that perpetuate gender inequality.” However, a number of outstanding questions remain. Campaigners have [expressed concern](#) that more substantial mainstreaming of gender equality is needed across the goals, and say that - as currently worded - many of the targets are gender-blind. Many women’s rights experts support the need for the target to include indicators that measure social norms.<sup>1</sup> VSO has launched a campaign called [Women in Power](#) seeking to ensure the standalone gender goal is maintained as negotiations begin.

Another concern relates to ensuring that gender, peace and security concerns are given sufficient priority. Conciliation Resources and Saferworld’s 2013 report [Gender, Violence and Peace: A post-2015 Agenda](#) posits that conflict and violence have been the most important factors obstructing progress on the MDGs to date. It suggests targets and indicators that illustrate how gender, peace and security can best be integrated into the framework.

### **3 Where next?**

A roadmap for the remaining post-2015 process was established at a ‘special event’ on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), held at the UN on 25 September 2013. Inter-governmental negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda will be launched at the beginning of the 69<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly in September 2014. In the few months remaining until then, preparatory events will be held, and the Secretary-General will publish a report laying the foundations for the final year of negotiations.

Key issues for the remaining negotiations include:

- **The inclusion of civil society:** NGOs have often been critical about the extent to which they were able to participate in the formulation of the MDGs fifteen years ago. Will the post-2015 process be more inclusive?
- Will the [guiding principles](#) set out by **the High Level Panel** be evident in the final set of goals? For example, how will the new framework address the (structural) causes of

poverty? How will it incorporate global trends and uncertainties about the international development agenda over the next 10-30 years?

- Striking the balance between making the goals sufficiently universal, and ensuring consistency with **national priorities and targets**
- Formulating accountability mechanism and establishing an effective **monitoring process**.

***Further reading:***

The [Beyond 2015](#) civil society campaign website

'Zero draft' of post-2015 goals

'Mind the gap: why UN development goals must tackle economic inequality' *The Guardian* 1 July 2014