Beyond the Millennium Development Goals

Agreeing to a Post-2015 Development Framework

An MGO Working Paper

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Preface

On 6 September 2000, in the closing days of his administration, President Clinton welcomed the largest-ever gathering of world leaders to New York for the Millennium Summit.

"If I have learned anything in these last eight years, it is, whether we like it or not, we are growing more interdependent," he told them. "We must look for more solutions in which all sides can claim a measure of victory and move away from choices in which someone is required to accept complete defeat."

The Millennium Summit is remembered for the promise leaders made to join together in a joint endeavor to free "the entire human race from want." Unlike many international commitments, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are still remembered more than a decade later. And poverty has indeed fallen across the world, much more quickly than most of us expected.

The debate has now begun on what should replace the MDGs when they expire in 2015. Do we need a new set of global development goals? If so, should they be for the very poorest? Or should they be extended to the broader challenges of a planet that will have more than 8 billion people by 2030?

Any attempt to answer these questions quickly takes us into contentious territory. The world was a simpler place in 2000, before 9/11 brought home the dangers posed by fragile and failed states such as Afghanistan, and before the financial crisis demonstrated how vulnerable we are to risks that move uncontrollably across national borders.

The benefits of globalization have also increased the complexity of challenges the world faces. The past decade has seen the explosive growth of China and the other emerging economies, expanding the circle of countries that must be included in any attempt to create a prosperous and stable global order.

The original version of this paper was written for a private seminar that Brookings organized at the request of the US government. The rise of new powers has not reduced the need for US leadership; it has increased it. In today's world, effective collective action is inconceivable if the United States does not play an active role in shaping a rapidly-changing global order.

The Managing Global Order initiative exists to help this and future US administrations provide that leadership.

The attempt to replace the MDGs is a test case for whether the world's governments can still muster the common purpose to come together to tackle long-term challenges. The potential dividend is great, especially in a deeply uncertain age, when many citizens are deeply skeptical of their leaders' ability to offer an inspiring vision of the future.

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Managing Global Order | *Rising powers. Evolving threats. How can we shape the evolving order?*

Acknowledgments

Summary

This paper provides an overview of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and their expected status in 2012; describes the background to, and options for, a post-2015 framework; and discusses how governments can best navigate the political challenges of agreeing to a new set of development goals.

The MDGs were the fruit of a long effort to build consensus around a set of targets for reducing poverty. While not all goals will be met by 2015, the headline target (halving absolute poverty) will be comfortably exceeded. Progress in China has made a disproportionate contribution to the MDGs, but headway has been made in all regions, including Africa.

Debate on the successor to the MDGs began in earnest in 2011 and has been influenced by developments elsewhere in the international system, such as the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, and – above all – proposals in the run up to Rio+20 for a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

When considering options for new goals after 2015, there are five key questions. Are new goals needed? Should they be universal (7 billion people) or just apply to the most vulnerable (1-2 billion)? How broad should they be? Should SDGs subsume, be separate from, or complement the MDGs? And should the new goals be binding or aspirational?

The answers to these questions lead to the following potential outcomes for a post-2015 framework:

- *Full SDGs* – universal and binding goals, that provide comprehensive coverage of the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

- *SDG-Lite* – a package of goals that has been diluted in an *ad hoc* way as controversial elements are vetoed during the negotiation process.

- *MDG+* – revised poverty goals that are either less coherent than the current goals (a 'Christmas tree' framework), or more so (supporting eye-catching headline targets with a set of 'capabilities' that a society needs to develop if it is to reduce poverty).

- *Hybrids* – various SDG/MDG blends, such as 'twin track' (SDGs run alongside MDGs) or 'planetary ceiling/social floor' (respect global environmental boundaries, while providing minimum standard of living for all).

- *Car Crash* – failure to agree any goals at all.

For governments and international organizations, the politics of agreeing an effective post-2015 framework are likely to prove extremely difficult. Deep disagreements are likely to surface between developed, emerging, and developing countries, while continued economic turmoil will distract leaders' attention from longer-term challenges. Early rhetoric on the

SDGs has set the bar for success unfeasibly high, and sustained media criticism can be expected when it proves impossible to deliver against this standard.

Many governments will adopt a low profile, but there is considerable space for a leading country, or group of countries, to act early to 'shape the debate' on what should and can be delivered after 2015.

While enthusiasm for the idea of SDGs has so far crowded out discussion of goals focused more specifically on poverty reduction, this agenda may well only play a niche role after Rio+20, given the political obstacles to adoption of a universal, comprehensive and binding set of goals for sustainable development.

The UN's new Energy for All goals, however, have shown the potential for creative approaches that are developed outside traditional inter-governmental negotiations and that bring together governments, the private sector, and civil society. This may provide a model for the development of a loose family of similar goals.

At the same time, a commitment to end absolute poverty would make an inspiring, and politically attractive, headline target for 2030. Fundamental work is needed to explore the feasibility of this goal, analyzing the 'geography of poverty' after 2015 and determining the most effective ways of making a difference to the lives of world's most vulnerable people.

The immediate priority is to set out in more concrete terms options for the design of post-2015 goals, forcing all key actors to confront the benefits and costs of each option. This can be used to catalyze the formation of a 'guiding coalition' with the energy and political will needed to win agreement for the preferred option.

Introduction

In the Millennium Declaration, 189 governments described the world's central challenge as ensuring that "globalization becomes a positive force for all the world's people" and made a commitment to "freeing the entire human race from want."[1] Following the Declaration, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were finalized in 2002,[2] with a deadline of 2015 for delivery.

The quest for a replacement for the MDGs began in 2010, when the UN General Assembly asked the Secretary-General to make recommendations "for further steps to advance the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015."[3] Ban Ki-Moon has made the agreement of new goals a centerpiece of his second term, promising to "forge consensus around a post-2015 sustainable development framework and implement it."[4]

This paper:

- Provides an overview of the MDGs and their expected status in 2015.

- Describes background to, and options for, a post-2015 framework.

- Discusses the political challenges of agreeing a new framework and sets out considerations for governments and other stakeholders.

The Millennium Development Goals

The MDGs comprise eight goals and 21 targets (see Figure 1), of which some are both specific and resonant ("reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day"), while others are not quantified and have been largely forgotten ("make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications").

The MDGs were the culmination of a protracted process that stretched back to the 1990 World Development Report, which proposed a target for halving poverty, and the World Children's Summit of the same year, which adopted a number of social development goals, such as halving maternal mortality.[5]

Agreement of the goals relied on: (i) technical consensus, with the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and its informal *Groupe de Réflexion* playing a central role, and the US as an especially influential actor in this process; (ii) a concerted campaign by a small group of European international development ministers; (iii) development and dissemination of a common position by the World Bank, IMF, UN and OECD (in a report called *2000: A Better World For All*);[6] (iv) a set piece event to reach 'big picture' consensus (the Millennium Summit); and (v) a technical process that followed the summit and reconciled competing visions for which goals should be included and how they should be quantified.

Are the Millennium Development Goals on Target?

Goal 1 – Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

🟢 Target 1a: Reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day

🔴 Target 1b: Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people

❓ Target 1c: Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

Goal 2 – Achieve universal primary education

🟠 Target 2a: Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling

Goal 3 – Promote gender equality and empower women

🟢🔴 Target 3a: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015

Goal 4 – Reduce child mortality

🟠 Target 4a: Reduce by two thirds the mortality rate among children under five

Goal 5 – Improve maternal health

🔴 Target 5a: Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio

🔴 Target 5b: Achieve, by 2015, universal access to reproductive health

Goal 6 – Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

🟢 Target 6a: Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS

🔴 Target 6b: Achieve, by 2010, universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS

🟢 Target 6c: Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

Goal 7 – Ensure environmental sustainability

🔴 Target 7a: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes; reverse loss of environmental resources

🔴 Target 7b: Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss

🟢🟠 Target 7c: Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation

🟢 Target 7d: Achieve significant improvement in lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, by 2020

Goal 8 – Develop a Global Partnership for Development

❓ Target 8a: Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system

❓ Target 8b: Address the special needs of the least developed countries

❓ Target 8c: Address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and small island developing States

❓ Target 8d: Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries

❓ Target 8e: In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries

❓ Target 8f: In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications

Key:

🟢 Target met or will be met by 2015   🟠 Target within reach

🔴 Target will not be met by 2015   ❓ Un-quantified target or no data

Figure 1

For a time, there was widespread belief that the MDGs would be a failure.[7] Growth in low and middle income countries, however, has been robust in recent years and progress on poverty has accelerated (see figure 2). In 1990, 43% of the population of developing countries was estimated to have been living on less than $1.25 a day at 2005 prices.[8] That fell to 22.4% in 2008, and, barring a catastrophic economic reversal, the MDG poverty target will be comfortably exceeded in 2015.[*]

Proportion of developing world population living on less than $1.25 a day

*Projections assume progress continues at the rate seen after 2002
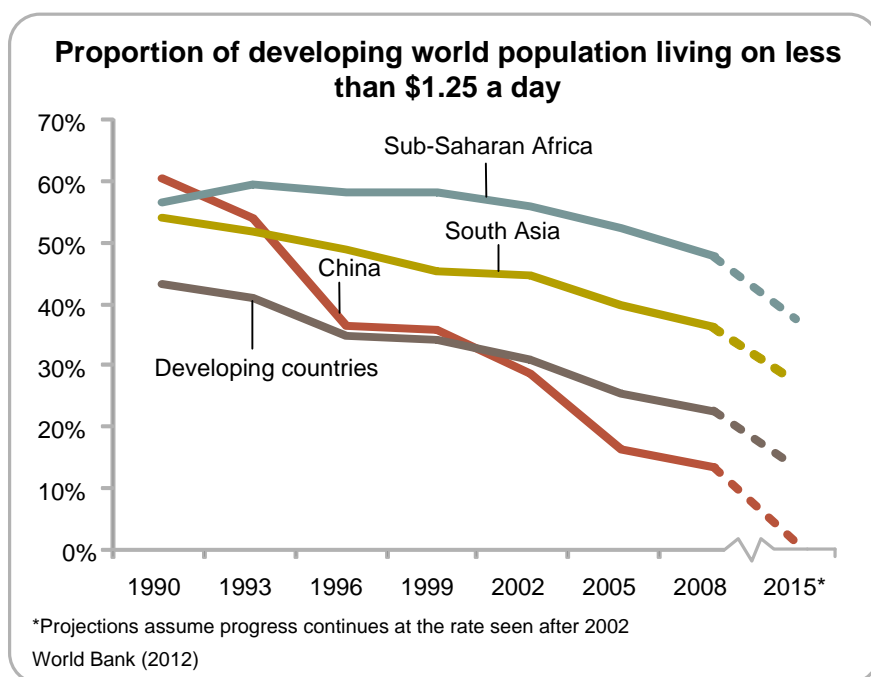
World Bank (2012)

Figure 2

While progress has been fastest in China, poverty reduction has occurred in all regions. Even excluding China, the rest of the world will meet the poverty target if progress continues at the rate achieved since 2002, including significant steps towards the poverty MDG in Africa.

However, given population growth, absolute numbers of poor people have fallen more slowly. The burden of poverty in 2015 will still be substantial, therefore. By then, 880 million people are projected to be below the absolute poverty line on the post-2002 trajectory (rising to a billion or so if poverty reduction slows). 2-2.3 billion people will be living on less than $2 a day.

Progress on other MDGs can be split into the following categories:

▪ *Already met*: provision of safe drinking water (% without access projected to fall by a third by 2015),[9] improvement in lives of slum dwellers,[10] spread of HIV/AIDS,[11] decline in incidence of malaria and other diseases.[12]

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[*] The World Bank's poverty data are far from perfect, relying on household surveys that cover only 90% of the population of developing countries and which are themselves of varying quality. In addition, the estimates use Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) estimates to account for variations in the cost of living across countries. These have to be corrected due to biases in the sampling surveys on which they are based. As the World Bank's Chief Economist in Africa comments, "even the… celebratory estimate of poverty declining in Africa during a period of growth needs to be taken with a grain of salt. In reality, there are many countries for which we simply don't know." http://bit.ly/H2ucCZ. Estimates for poverty at the $2 a day line differ by as much as a factor of two.

- *Within reach*: gender equality in primary education, halving the proportion of people living in poverty,[13] child mortality (but only with a dramatic acceleration in progress), access to sanitation (again, acceleration needed).[14]

- *Will not be met*: universal primary education (considerable progress, but many countries will not 'get to zero' on this target),[15] gender equality in secondary education,[16] maternal mortality,[17] universal access to reproductive health[18] and treatment for HIV/AIDS,[19] and sustainable development and biodiversity loss (where there has been a substantial deterioration).[20]

- *No data*: hunger (the FAO withdrew its estimates for 2009 and 2010 and is attempting to devise a new methodology).[21]

- *Unrealistic/unquantified targets*: full employment in all countries; an open/predictable trading and financial system; meeting the 'special needs' of least developed and landlocked countries, and small island states; achieving long-term debt sustainability (arguably at least partially met); access to pharmaceuticals and new technologies.

Overall, the picture is relatively positive. Poverty has fallen in all regions and social development indicators have improved, some of them dramatically. Hunger *may* be an important exception, but the data are too weak to be sure. Environmental sustainability, however, remains an increasingly distant goal.

Yet, questions remain as to whether the MDGs themselves will have had any significant impact on these outcomes. Surprisingly little systematic empirical work has been done to evaluate the 'results chain' that runs from the MDGs, via government and donor policies and investment, to poverty reduction. What evidence there is suggests that:

- The MDGs have been an effective <u>advocacy and communication</u> tool, resonating both with politicians and with the public.[22]

- There has been an impact on the <u>policy environment</u>, with both developing countries and donors building the MDGs into their strategies.[23]

- The MDGs have increasingly acted as a common strategic language, making it easier for <u>new actors</u> (NGOs, foundations, businesses) to work with governments in addressing development challenges.

- As a result of the MDGs, <u>more money</u> may have gone to developing countries, and to the poor within these countries, and in particular to key service sectors such as health and education - but this is hard to establish in the absence of a counterfactual.[24]

- Some countries have pursued policies which have <u>improved the lives of the poor</u> at a faster rate than would be expected from economic growth alone, but the link to the MDGs has not been established.[25]

- Evaluation has generally been weak in international development, with few donors or governments accountable for <u>outcomes on poverty</u>. The MDGs are thus part of a broader problem of demonstrating development effectiveness.

- The greatest impact of the MDGs may be <u>yet to come</u>, given the lag in implementing policies (USAID's first strategy for meeting the MDGs was not agreed until 2010)[26] and the tendency to accelerate programs to meet the 2015 deadline (most of the UK Department for International Development's programs have MDG-related targets for that date, for example).[27]

Towards a Post-2015 Framework

Debate on the successor to the MDGs began in earnest in 2011. In July, the UN Secretary-General issued a report arguing that: (i) the MDG framework would still be relevant after 2015, given that the current targets reduce, rather than eliminate, poverty and deprivation; (ii) 'core values' from the Millennium Declaration need to be reinforced, with increased coverage of issues such as inequality, energy and food security, environmental sustainability, human rights and good governance, and peace and security.[28]

Other processes have influenced debate on the role that goals should play in the future of development. The Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation has underlined the importance of country ownership of development priorities, a greater focus on, and accountability for, results, and closer partnerships for delivery of development outcomes (with an emphasis on South-South cooperation).[29] Following Busan, the days when goals could be determined and driven by the OECD, with European governments in the vanguard promoting their adoption, are clearly over.

There has also been increased emphasis on fragile and conflict-affected states, where approximately a quarter of those in absolute poverty currently live (and where the poor will stay poor longest).[†,30] This is reflected in the 2011 World Development Report and in the work of the g7+, a group of nineteen fragile states that launched A New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States at Busan (the New Deal is now endorsed by 17 other states and 6 international organizations).[31] The New Deal promotes five Peace and Statebuilding Goals (PSGs) intended to create a conducive environment for delivery of the MDGs in fragile environments (see Box 1). This represents an initial attempt to define targets for the capabilities and institutions that states require to deliver for their citizens, and recognizes the obstacle that violence and conflict poses to poverty reduction.

> **The Five Peace and Statebuilding Goals**
>
> (i) Legitimate Politics - Foster inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution;
>
> (ii) Security - Establish and strengthen people's security;
>
> (iii) Justice - Address injustices and increase people's access to justice;
>
> (iv) Economic Foundations - Generate employment and improve livelihoods;
>
> (v) Revenues & Services - Manage revenue and build capacity for accountable and fair service delivery.

Box 1

[†] This figure is considerably higher if one includes the poor who live in conflict-related regions of otherwise stable states (e.g. the 125 of 640 districts that the Indian government defines as affected by the Naxalite insurgency). In addition, up to 10% of the world's poor live in states that have 'recovered' from conflict or state fragility over the past ten years.

Most significant, however, has been the intersection between post-2015 discussions and preparations for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). The Colombian and Guatemalan governments have proved unexpectedly effective at shaping debate in the run up to the summit through a proposal that Rio+20 should adopt a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which sets out targets for poverty; changing consumption patterns; food, energy, and water; and biodiversity and other environmental objectives (climate change is not mentioned).[32] Their proposal is largely based on Agenda 21, an action plan for sustainable development that emerged from the 1992 Rio Earth Summit.

The relationship between SDGs and MDGs is fluid, but increasingly close. The Colombian/Guatemalan proposal envisaged that the SDGs would run in parallel with the MDGs until 2015 and then subsume the development goals. This approach has now been endorsed by the UN Secretary-General, who has called for SDGs to be built on the foundation provided by the MDGs with the aim of providing "equitable economic and social progress that respects our planet's environmental boundaries."[33]

The UN's High-level Panel on Global Sustainability also supported SDGs and set out principles for their development. In particular, it argued that the new goals should be:

- Universal, "covering challenges to all countries rather than just developing nations"; *and*

- Comprehensive, "reflecting equally the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and the interconnections between them."[34]

These principles are reflected in the January 2012 'zero draft' of the Rio+20 outcome document, which includes a commitment to "a set of global Sustainable Development Goals" that are intended to be both universal (all countries) and comprehensive (seven priority areas: oceans; food security and sustainable agriculture; sustainable energy for all; water access and efficiency; sustainable cities; green jobs, decent work and social inclusion; and disaster risk reduction and resilience). The draft envisages that the SDGs will replace the MDGs after 2015, creating a unified UN Development Agenda.

Work is furthest advanced on energy, due to the efforts of the UN's Sustainable Energy for All initiative, which provides a potential model for other SDGs. It has proposed a target (presumably non-binding) with three components, all of which are to be achieved by 2030: (i) universal access to modern energy services; (ii) double the rate of improvement in energy efficiency; (iii) double the global share of renewable energy.[35] These targets are reflected in the Rio+20 zero draft (although this text is resisted by the G77).

Governments are divided on whether SDGs are a good idea and, if they are, how they should be structured. China and the G77 have called for greater prioritization of poverty within an SDG framework.[36] India has said that SDGs should be "aspirational and voluntary", and is sceptical of quantitative targets.[37] Brazil and Mexico are promoting a universal post-2015 agenda, which incorporates MDGs.[38] Africa "is not averse to the SDGs but emphasizes that it must not be a convenient excuse to bypass or disregard MDGs."[39] Many countries, including key players like the United States, have yet to clarify their position.

More generally, the post-2015 debate clearly remains in its formative stages. Participation has so far been largely confined to 'insiders' (environment ministries, or the environmental sections of foreign ministries, as well as academics, campaigners, etc). Political advisers to heads of government (who will be sensitive to domestic political pressures), and ministries of finance (who will be alert to resource implications) are as yet largely uninvolved, while groups whose interests could be threatened by one or more potential goals have yet to mobilize.

Rio+20 will clarify the issues at stake, underlining the need for further analysis, debate, and negotiation, but decisive breakthroughs are unlikely. Governments will almost certainly kick hard choices further down the road, with the proposed High-level Panel on the post-2015 agenda likely to struggle to strike the right balance between vision and feasibility. It is therefore timely to step back and attempt to understand the strategic choices that lie behind various options for development goals after 2015.

Options for Future Goals

In order to understand these choices, there are five key questions.

- *Do we need new goals at all?* Few have paused to ask whether new goals are really needed, given the lack of conclusive evidence for the impact of the current MDGs, and the risk that a 'sequel' will gain less traction than the original. In particular, it is important to build a case for why quantified targets are likely to be an effective tool to increase sustainability, especially in contentious areas where governments have proved unwilling or unable to act.

- *Should goals be universal?* Goals that apply to all people in all countries (7 billion) would be very different in nature from the current MDGs, which focus on the needs of the most vulnerable (fewer than 1 billion at $1.25 a day, 2 billion at $2 a day).

- *How broad should goals be?* Goals could be narrow (a small set of headline targets in specific sectors), comprehensive (all aspects of society, economy, and the environment), or somewhere in between (on the model of the current MDGs, which cover a representative set of issues).

- *Do we need one, or more than one, framework?* An ambitious package of SDGs would logically subsume MDGs, but it is possible to imagine slimmed down SDGs living alongside revised MDGs ('twin tracks'), or a variety of hybrid models (a loose 'family' of goals, that could apply just to poor countries or be universal in nature).

- *Should the framework be binding?* The MDGs were designed as global, rather than national, targets and probably could not have been agreed if they had imposed binding obligations on governments. However, they have increasingly been applied at country level and have even been incorporated into legislation and/or the constitution of some countries.[40] Should future goals be applied at national as well as global level? And should they define rights or desired outcomes?

Based on these choices, the following broad options emerge.

Full SDGs **Universal and comprehensive goals for rich and poor alike, with national targets that are at least weakly binding.**

This option currently has some momentum and will continue to absorb political bandwidth. It is hard, however, to imagine any leading power accepting a framework that would require it to take costly or politically controversial decisions at home.

India is already explicitly opposed to binding SDGs and China is sitting on the side lines. The United States will be wary of accepting binding commitments and of being seen to cede authority to the UN. Even Europe is probably too divided to mobilize behind this cause.

Full SDGs may have eventually have their day, but they remain an improbable outcome for 2015.

SDG-Lite **The SDG concept is progressively diluted as controversial goals are dropped (less comprehensive) and targets become increasingly aspirational or even voluntary (less universal and/or binding).**

This option is most likely to emerge as an unsatisfactory compromise, with ambitious proposals degrading in an *ad hoc* way as they meet political reality.

An SDG-Lite framework runs the risk of failing to satisfy governments, campaigners and the media; and of being too diffuse for effective implementation.

If the MDGs are subsumed into this framework, focus on the needs of the poorest may also be lost, as rich countries downgrade their development programs.

MDG+ **The key design principle for the MDGs is retained – only poor people are covered – but the current framework is revised, possibly extensively.**

A revised MDG framework could result from a rush by interest groups to add new goals, leading to a 'Christmas tree' framework that becomes more cumbersome and loses its power to mobilize policymakers and the public.

An alternative approach would be to control the number of headline goals (eye-catching, quantified, binding), but to complement them with an set of *systemic capabilities* for governance and institutions, based on the Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals put forward by the g7+. These could be more complex and have softer measures that are peer reviewed.

A crucial question will be whether or not to raise the poverty line. On the one hand, sticking with $1.25 would allow the goals to be framed as an attempt to

end absolute poverty once and for all. On the other, a higher poverty line may be more relevant, especially for the urban poor, who face a higher cost of living.

Hybrids
A hybrid option that combines SDGs and MDGs (and potentially other elements).

A number of hybrids have already been suggested and this space is ripe for policy innovation from any government or other actor who is prepared to design and promote a new approach (see Box 2).

Hybrids offer the potential to agree revised MDGs *early* in the process, ensuring the needs of the poorest are dealt with first, while reassuring developing country governments that SDGs will not be used to marginalize them.

Discussion of a sustainability component can then proceed at a measured pace, allowing time for consensus to develop about a future direction.

Many of the more ambitious hybrids take governments into highly controversial areas (climate change or financial regulation, for example). For this reason, an evolutionary approach might work, with a small number of goals agreed by 2015, but then added to over time as consensus grows.

Over a decade, or longer, a new normative framework could emerge in this way (the Universal Declaration on Human Rights provides an analogy).

Car Crash
The international system has experienced sufficient numbers of stalled processes in recent years, particularly in the area of sustainable development, for the risk of failure to be taken seriously.

Consensus around the MDGs emerged over a ten year period and at a time of relative global optimism and prosperity. Continued crisis in the global economy – or a serious security threat – will make it extremely difficult to reach a new agreement. Most major countries also face elections or other political transitions between now and 2015.

A car crash scenario could be highly unpredictable, leading – for example – to a decision to 'roll forward' the current MDGs for another five years.

Hybrid Post-2015 Frameworks

Hybrid models do not aim to deliver a fully integrated SDG framework, but instead allow a revised set of MDGs to co-exist with new approaches to improving sustainability.

Options include:

- *Twin track* – a binding set of MDGs run alongside a loose 'family' of SDGs. SDGs would be added on an issue-by-issue basis, using the Energy for All goals as a model, as and when sufficient consensus develops to allow a new SDG to be agreed.

- *Planetary ceiling/social floor* – an Oxfam proposal for two complementary, but distinct, types of goals: establishing minimum standards for human well-being on the one hand, and ensuring the world stays within planetary boundaries on the other.[41]

- *MDGs/global public goods* – as with the Oxfam model, this option combines social and global goals, but the latter would cover a broader basket of global public goods (such as those defined by International Task Force on Global Public Goods: infectious diseases; financial stability; trade; peace and security; and knowledge and research), and not just environmental limits.[42]

- *Matrix* – a single set of headline goals, but with targets that are differentiated for countries at different stages of development (a rich country's target for natural resources might focus on conservation, for example, while a poor country's focuses on access).

- *Pledge and Review* – the United States has proposed a 'compendium of commitments' where any actor or partnership can pledge to meet a target and have its performance regularly reviewed (this voluntary approach is similar to that used by the Clinton Global Initiative).

There are also potential options that use tools other than goals to achieve sustainability objectives.

For example, an expert panel (modeled on the IPCC) could provide an integrated assessment of trajectories against a set of sustainability indicators, drawing on economic, social, and environmental modeling conducted throughout the international system. Its role would be to provide, on a regular basis, an objective answer to the question: what do current and planned policies imply for future global sustainability?

Box 2

The Politics of the Post-2015 Agenda

To date, discussions on the post-2015 agenda have primarily taken place at the technical level, but Rio+20 will launch what is likely to be a highly contentious political debate. Positions will inevitably harden and progress is likely to be hard to achieve.

If it they are to maximize their leverage, governments will need to develop a robust and coherent political strategy. This should be based on the following considerations.

1. **Leadership will be a scarce resource.**

   The early runners (Colombia, Guatemala, and probably also the Secretary-General) have made their play, but are unlikely to be able to take the agenda much further forward. Rio+20 is likely to be both contentious and a damp squib. This will diminish incentives for others to take a leading role.

   The High-level Panel on the post-2015 agenda could be influential, but recent panels have had a patchy record at best. Much will depend on the effectiveness of the Chairs and Secretariat. There are wildcards – such as the proposal for a commission modeled on the UN Millennium Project – but on the current trajectory, it is not clear who will lead and shape this debate in the way that the 'Utstein Group' of European development ministers did for the MDGs.

   Drift and delay are very real prospects.

2. **There is therefore plentiful space for new attempts to set an agenda.**

   The leadership vacuum leaves room for a new partnership to develop and promote fresh thinking on post-2015.

   This could be done publicly (through a major policy initiative); behind the scenes; or by creating a forum in which other actors can develop and promote new approaches. A prize fund, for example, for fully-worked up post-2015 proposals would be a cost effective way of generating new ideas and promoting debate on them.

   While there is room for big ideas, there is also a need to: (i) establish a firmer evidence base, ensuring that governments work from the same set of data when discussing areas of disagreement; (ii) amplify the contribution that key actors (African leaders, business leaders, the poor) make to the debate and in a way that is more than tokenistic.

   Timing will be critical. Rio+20 offers a platform, of course, but much depends on a broader decision on how much political capital governments should put behind the summit.

   The most decisive interventions will be made after Rio+20, however – and possibly very close to 2015, given that there will be points of breakdown in the negotiating process where new energy is likely to be badly needed.

3. **Ending poverty is a big political opportunity.**

   Many have become disconcertingly blasé about steep declines in rates of poverty. Campaigners and the media are primarily interested in failure. And governments have been slow to celebrate a notable success.

   A promise to <u>end</u> absolute poverty would be simple, inspiring, and easy to understand. If one or more world leaders combines to make this a central challenge at Rio+20, this could dramatically shift the focus onto what a revised MDG framework should look like.

Fundamental work is needed to clarify where the poor will be in 2015, what will happen to the profile of poverty if there is further progress to 2030, and what are the most effective ways to make a difference to the lives of the poor.

There are also serious questions to be addressed about the distribution of poverty across low and middle income countries; between stable and fragile states; and within states (such as India) that are dynamic at their core, but where poverty is increasingly confined to a conflict-affected periphery.

Analysis of the feasibility – and likely pace – of poverty reduction at different poverty lines could then be completed. Is rapid progress against $2/day poverty now feasible? Or, conversely, is it hard to see the most fragile states making any serious inroads into $1/day poverty by 2030?

This would allow a number of prototypes for an MDG+ framework to be designed and tested against key criteria (likely impact, communication potential, etc.). Given that the millennium is now behind us, the new framework should probably be launched under a new 'brand' such as Global Development Goals.

4. **In the short term, SDGs may well play only a niche role.**

As we have argued above, a full SDG framework is currently unlikely to be adopted. The SDG-Lite option may gain traction, but could result in a framework that is forgotten well before 2030.

However, the Energy for All goals show the potential for SDGs that draw on momentum that has built up around particular issues. A cluster of these goals could complement a revised MDG framework – with the poverty-related elements of these goals folded into an MDG+ framework.

The sustainable energy goals also emerged not from traditional inter-governmental negotiations, but from a much more dynamic process that brought together governments, the private sector, and civil society. This reflects the widely distributed nature of sustainability challenges, where many drivers lie beyond the direct policy influence of central governments.

More ambitious goals – those that aim to protect and provide global public goods – are worth 'blue skies' investigation, but this should probably happen outside the formal negotiation processes and based on a recognition that they may not be adopted any time soon.

5. **Ideas are not enough – we need a guiding coalition.**

The MDGs benefited from the work of a coalition that had common purpose and the political will to drive towards final agreement of a coherent set of quantified targets.

No such coalition exists today. There is no body positioned to play the role of the OECD DAC in the development of the MDGs, and no group of ministers prepared to twist the arms of their peers. Moreover, the world is more politically diverse: many more players will have to be convinced in order for there to be success.

The post-2015 agenda is most likely to fail because no-one takes responsibility for engineering the development of a post-2015 coalition, for identifying and enlisting the champions who will make success possible, or for creating deal-making forums in which the final trade-offs can be made.

For a revised set of MDGs, the nascent post-Busan partnership could begin to drive progress at a technical level, but political champions will still be needed. Progress on broader SDGs is *highly* unlikely unless one or more governments takes responsibility for assembling a coalition behind a new set of proposals.

6. **The possibility of failure should be taken seriously.**

Unfortunately, early rhetoric on the SDGs has already set the bar for success unfeasibly high.

This is great news for media and civil society. Instead of celebrating the MDGs, they will reach for a 'broken promises' narrative, and will inevitably look to cast a few OECD governments in the role of villain of the piece.

Adopting a low profile and defending red lines will probably not be enough to stop this from happening. Being seen to shape the debate just might. An investment in creative processes – outside of formal governmental negotiations – has the potential to create one or more post-2015 'prototypes' that will offer an alternative to the 'official' narrative emerging from Rio+20.

The international system's 'deal makers', however, need to take the prospect of failure seriously. The international system has suffered many setbacks in recent years, as it has failed to grapple with complex problems such as climate, trade, and financial regulation.

How can they prevent an outcome that is weaker than the current set of MDGs? How do they divert scarce political bandwidth away from unfeasible aspirations? What will they do if, in twelve months' time, little progress has been made?

Conclusion

A successor to the Millennium Development Goals will not be agreed without considerable will, imagination, intelligent compromise, and – in all probability – luck.

Although the MDGs themselves have demonstrated some success, the starting point for a negotiation of a successor framework is not an auspicious one. There is a lack of consensus about what new goals should achieve, and the ambitious attempt to agree universal and comprehensive SDGs may prove a costly distraction from the pursuit of more realistic objectives.

An attempt finally to end absolute poverty would be a worthy mission after 2015, however, and could be combined with a looser sustainability framework that could be tightened over time as its normative power grows.

At the moment, most governments and international organizations appear to underestimate how much work will be needed to agree a post-2015 framework that is both resonant and effective. The MDGs took twelve years to finalize. There is now only fraction of that time to put their successor in place.

The Geopolitics of Scarcity Project

The Managing Global Order program (MGO) is a joint project between Brookings Foreign Policy, the New York University Center on International Cooperation (CIC), and the Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC) at Stanford University.

MGO's Geopolitics of Scarcity project seeks to chart and communicate how changing patterns of supply and demand for natural resources (including energy, land, water, food, and minerals) will affect geopolitical relationships, and to identify opportunities to buttress the international system and mitigate risks related to resource scarcity.

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