

100 VOICES

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Southern perspectives on what should come after the Millennium Development Goals



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

For better or worse, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have constituted the longest standing paradigm that has ever emerged in development thinking. The goals have been an organising framework for international aid over the last ten years. At the core of countless policy documents, plans and announcements, they have attracted criticism as well as support. But what will happen after 2015, when the MDG deadline runs out? What, if anything, should follow the MDGs?

So far, the main voices responding to these pivotal questions have been established experts from powerful countries in the North. This joint research from the Catholic aid agency CAFOD and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) seeks to broaden the conversation, and to ensure that the voices of those directly involved in fighting poverty in the South are heard. Our research describes the perspectives of 104 representatives from civil society organisations, in 27 developing countries from across the world.

Key findings

Overwhelming support for a post-2015 framework

- Whatever reservations they had about the original MDGs, 87 per cent of our Southern civil society respondents wanted some kind of overarching, internationally agreed framework for development after 2015.

The MDGs were “a good thing”, despite their problems

- 75 per cent of respondents thought that the MDGs were “a good thing”. No respondent strongly disagreed with this statement.
- 72 per cent agreed that development had become a higher priority because of the MDGs.
- 60 per cent said the MDGs were a useful set of tools for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – describing their value for lobbying, monitoring, fundraising and project design.
- 66 per cent believed that the MDGs improved the effectiveness of aid. They described the goals as useful for project management, planning and accountability – but questioned the validity of the MDG indicators, and pointed to numerous outstanding problems.
- Respondents were remarkably positive about the validity of MDG evaluations – with over 66 per cent believing they would be a true indication of whether aid has worked in their country.
- 59 per cent said that the MDGs had helped to improve government planning. However, many raised concerns about the implementation of the goals, and the management of increased funds.
- Just over half of respondents thought the MDGs were more important to donors than they were to anyone else. Several said they had been of limited relevance to grassroots work, or poor citizens themselves.

- Respondents were split down the middle in terms of the longstanding critique of the MDGs – that they have distracted from the structural causes of poverty.
- 64 per cent thought that the MDGs had contributed to greater gender equality; 65 per cent felt they had increased focus on addressing HIV and AIDS; but only 28 per cent thought that MDGs had contributed to reducing conflict and building peace in their country.

A post-2015 framework must be developed through an inclusive, participative process; in partnership between North and South

- 86 per cent agreed that the process of deciding a new framework would be as important as the framework itself. They stressed the need for an open, participative process, including poor citizens in developing countries.
- The most frequently expressed opinion of respondents was a desire to see North and South work in partnership to develop a new framework – rather than having one or the other take the lead.

It must take better account of country contexts

- An overwhelming 94 per cent of respondents said that any new framework must take better account of country contexts than the original MDGs.

It must address climate change and the environment

- In addition to the enduring development concerns of **poverty, hunger, health and education**, respondents stressed that the **environment and climate change** were top priorities for a new framework.

Our research includes perspectives from 104 civil society representatives from 27 developing countries around the world.

New framework, new context

Agreeing the original MDGs took ten years of gestation and discussion. With less than five years to go until they run out, there is considerable time pressure to set a global process of deliberation for any new framework in place. Indeed, the political momentum required to build international compacts like the MDGs is enormous, and we can't take for granted that any new framework will be agreed to replace them.

The world has changed since the MDGs were formulated and signed. Discussions for a new framework will be framed by many factors, particularly the following:

- **An uncertain and increasingly unstable world**

Whilst the MDGs emerged in a relatively benign, stable and fiscally buoyant period, a new framework would have to be developed at a time when the economic crisis has swept away old certainties; when the threat of climate change looms large; and when changes in global governance and emerging actors have diffused geopolitical power. It will be more challenging to negotiate a major international framework in these circumstances, because the multiple competing interests that will have to be balanced are diverse and also constantly in flux. This context also compounds the challenge of ensuring a framework is solid enough to compel action and hold actors accountable, but also flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances and unforeseen events.

Six 'types' of Southern perspective

Qualitative data was used to construct six 'types', illustrating the range of views from our research respondents.

'Chuma'

Looking for action not words



- The MDGs were good in theory, but they were poorly implemented.
- Need to strengthen relationships between the top and the bottom in development; and between the North and the South.
- Countries should learn from their neighbours what works and what doesn't.
- A new framework should use geographic regions as a 'go-between' to mediate relationships at different levels, and adapt goals to regional contexts.

'Sister Hope'

The planning pragmatist



- MDGs were an important rallying point, both internationally and within developing countries.
- The substance of a new framework is the most important thing – keep the process in proportion.
- Need to analyse the interests of all different parties involved to broker a strong agreement.
- Ideally a new framework would be developed by both North and South, but the North should lever their power where necessary.

• Changing patterns of poverty

Most of the world's poor (around a billion people) no longer live in Low Income Countries (LICs). Seventy-two per cent of the world's poor now live in Middle Income Countries (MICs); with LICs accounting for 28 per cent, and Fragile LICs just 12 per cent. The total number of LICs has dropped (from around 60 in the mid 1990s to 38 today), whilst the number of MICs has risen. This is highly significant in terms of a post-2015 framework, as it poses the question of how development happens and what the best tools are to foster it in different contexts. The issue of where aid is allocated and what it seeks to achieve is key – and a broader range of instruments (for example, tax and trade policy, multilateral cooperation, climate policy etc) may be increasingly critical for development progress.

• Indicator innovation

A variety of new approaches to measuring poverty and development have been proposed, many of which focus on the measurement of people's wellbeing, rather than measuring economic production. The Sarkozy Commission; the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report Office (HDRO); Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI); Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Wellbeing in Developing Countries Network and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) One-world indicators have all proposed richer, more multidimensional approaches.

'Rom'

Bottom-up is best



- The MDGs were a useful 'hook' for funding and advocacy.
- There are no blue-prints for development – every country context is different.
- Inclusive consultation and participation will be critical for a new framework.
- Whatever comes after the MDGs must maximise power for those 'on the ground', who can adapt development solutions to their circumstances.

'Valeria'

The rights-based advocate



- The MDGs were better than nothing, but they could have been much more.
- A new framework needs to ensure governments honour their responsibilities to citizens.
- Minorities must be protected; especially from threats to the environment and climate change.
- Whatever comes after the MDGs must be based on rights, rather than needs.

'Amero'

International frameworks are a waste of time



- The North tried to dominate the MDG framework.
- The MDGs changed the language around development, but not what actually happens in reality.
- The goals were manipulated by elites; ordinary citizens were excluded.
- Southern advocacy should concentrate on changing trade rules and the private sector, rather than frameworks like the MDGs that are designed for aid.

'Jamal'

Capitalise on the MDG gains



- Don't waste all the hard work and progress made through the MDGs.
- Has been critical to align donors around goals, and encourage governments to take a holistic approach to development.
- Need to revise/update the existing framework.
- The process of developing a new framework should be co-led between North and South.

Considering the options

We posed three basic post-2015 options to our respondents:

- 1) Keep the existing MDG targets and extend the deadline.
- 2) Expand and develop the existing MDG framework.
- 3) Create a new and different framework for development.

Fifty-four per cent of respondents indicated that they would prefer to expand and develop the existing framework, while nearly 30 per cent said that there should be a new and different framework after 2015.

There was a very low appetite for keeping the existing MDG targets and simply extending the deadline.

The prevailing opinion was that there was a need to learn the lessons from MDG experience, and revise the framework in view of the current context and new issues that have arisen. There was a strong sense that extending the deadlines would undermine accountability and the value of time-bound indicators – but also that the investments of time, infrastructure and energy in the current MDGs should be built upon.

As a matter of urgency, the international community must kick-start a global process of deliberation to construct a new over-arching framework for global development after 2015.

Post-2015 trade-offs

Those seeking to construct a new international framework for development after the MDGs will have to face a number of trade-offs; both in terms of the process they undertake to decide the framework, and the content of the framework itself:

On process:

- Developing the framework through a genuinely inclusive, participatory process; versus ensuring it gains the necessary political momentum to forge agreement.
- Taking the time to ‘take stock’ of the MDGs; versus seizing the opportunity of their closure and preventing the debate from ‘going cold’.

On the framework itself:

- Ensuring the framework is as widely relevant as possible (and includes the issues neglected by the MDGs); versus making it pithy, coherent and memorable.
- Ensuring the framework takes account of the particular development contexts to be found throughout the world; versus ensuring it connects and galvanises the development movement as a whole.
- Addressing the causes of poverty and injustice; versus ensuring the framework can be agreed by international consensus.
- Making sure the framework is ‘ambitious’ versus making sure it is ‘realistic’; and judging what these two terms really mean in an increasingly unpredictable and uncertain world.

Recommendations

For all the diverse voices we have heard through this report, there is one clear, unequivocal message:

- As a matter of urgency, the international community must **kick-start a global process of deliberation** to construct a new over-arching framework for global development after 2015.

We can also point to the following additional recommendations:

- Policy-makers, politicians and leaders in both **North and South should work together in partnership** to lead the new framework.
- Everyone with a stake in development should prepare for a **passionate and demanding debate**; it will be a challenge to reconcile opposing views.
- Development thinkers, practitioners, academics and policy-makers must **address the trade-offs** a new framework must contend with, especially that of formulating a framework that takes account of **country context**; and yet galvanises development internationally.
- As well as the core development concerns and issues neglected by the MDGs, a new framework must **make the environment and climate change a priority**.

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