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Governance in the post-2015 agenda:
Incorporating collection and
access to information

Climate change and the HLPF

a multi-stakeholder
magazine on
climate change
and sustainable
development

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pic: William Murphy - Informatique

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About Stakeholder Forum

Stakeholder Forum is an international organisation working to advance sustainable development and promote democracy at a global level. Our work aims to enhance open, accountable and participatory international decision-making on sustainable development through enhancing the involvement of stakeholders in intergovernmental processes. For more information, visit: www.stakeholderforum.org

Outreach is a multi-stakeholder publication on climate change and sustainable development. It is the longest continually produced stakeholder magazine in the sustainable development arena, published at various international meetings on the environment; including the UNCSD meetings (since 1997), UNEP Governing Council, UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP) and World Water Week. Published as a daily edition, in both print and web form, Outreach provides a vehicle for critical analysis on key thematic topics in the sustainability arena, as well as a voice of regional and local governments, women, indigenous peoples, trade unions, industry, youth and NGOs. To fully ensure a multi-stakeholder perspective, we aim to engage a wide range of stakeholders for article contributions and project funding.

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Climate change and the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

Joy Hyvarinen

Foundation for International Environmental Law and Development (FIELD)

Setting expectations

The first meeting of the new High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on sustainable development is meant to have an “inaugural character”, but may provide important signals for what to expect from the Forum in the future. Country statements will indicate expectations and ambitions.

Its hybrid nature, with Forum meetings divided between the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), may create challenges. How will the HLPF avoid being simply a series of UNGA or ECOSOC meetings with a different name?

States have agreed that the Forum’s agenda is to be ‘focused, dynamic and action-oriented’ while ensuring consideration of new and emerging sustainable development challenges.

A strong agenda with clear priorities would help to make the HLPF strong and relevant. FIELD believes that these priorities should include climate change impacts on poor and vulnerable countries and communities.

Climate challenges for poor and vulnerable countries and communities

Climate change itself is no longer a new sustainable development challenge, but the scale of its impacts is an unprecedented one.

Poor and vulnerable countries and communities on the development frontline face a great threat from climate change. For example, World Bank President Jim Yong Kim has said: “if we don’t confront climate change, we won’t end poverty.” The sustainable development prospects of these countries are diminished by climate change, which they have done little or nothing to cause.

The impacts of climate change on poor and vulnerable countries and communities should be a priority agenda item for the HLPF. The lack of progress in the international negotiations under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) makes this urgent.

In the UNFCCC negotiations countries have set 2015 as a deadline for concluding a new climate change agreement and for agreeing additional actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions before 2020. In a weak compromise, countries accepted that the new agreement will only be implemented from 2020. However, 2015 represents a crucial target date for intergovernmental processes on both climate change and sustainable development, with a set of universal Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also due to be agreed by 2015. It is anticipated that the HLPF will be responsible for overseeing the implementation and monitoring of these new global goals at the UN level.

In the danger zone

Several recent reports have confirmed that the world is not on course towards the goal agreed under the UNFCCC to limit the average global temperature increase to 2°C.

For example, a recent report by the International Energy Agency indicates that based on existing policies long-term warming between 3.6 and 5.3 °C is more likely, with most of the increase occurring this century. Impacts in poor and vulnerable countries would be likely to be devastating.

The UNFCCC’s objective is to prevent dangerous climate change. Parties have not defined what should be considered “dangerous”. Doing so would raise many challenging questions, for example: dangerous for whom?

However, many would argue that current greenhouse gas concentrations and emission trends suggest strongly that the danger point has been passed, at least from the point of view of poor and vulnerable countries and communities.

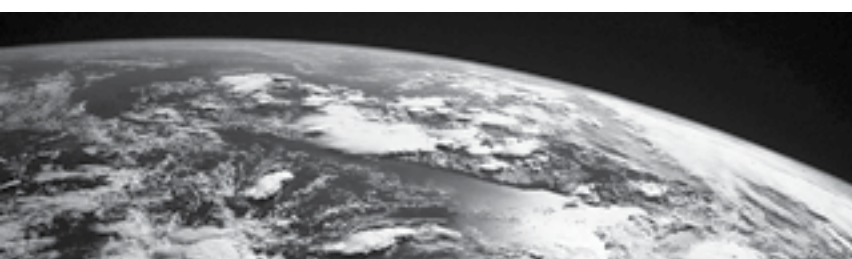
Threat to sustainable development

The HLPF should recognise the threat climate change poses to its core purpose of promoting sustainable development. Without decisive progress in the UNFCCC negotiations this threat will continue to grow rapidly.

The world needs a second line of defence against climate change. Climate change is impacting all countries, but the poorest and most vulnerable are likely to suffer the worst impacts. Their fate should be a priority concern for the HLPF from the start ■

MORE INFO

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Governance in the post-2015 agenda: Incorporating collection and access to information

David Banisar
Article 19

In the global debate on the shape of development policy post-Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), improving governance has been one of the top concerns of civil society raised during consultations convened by the UN, as well as in international reports, including that of the Secretary-General's High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

An essential part of good governance is ensuring access to information, which plays a vital role in ensuring accountability at all levels. A lack of information on development aspects is believed to be a significant factor for the international community's likely failure to fully meet all of the MDGs. Jeffrey Sachs has stated that "One of the biggest drawbacks of the MDGs is that the data is often years out of date. Accurate published information from the past 12 months is still not available for most low-income countries."

In recent years, there has been a growing international recognition of the importance of information in assuring human rights and meeting development needs. Access to information has been declared to be a human right according to the UN Human Rights Commission and the Special Rapporteurs on safe drinking water, extreme poverty, toxic wastes, and health, among others. It is also included in the UN Convention against Corruption, which has been ratified by over 160 countries.

Right to information laws have been adopted in nearly 100 countries and are often used to promote socio-economic rights. For example, in India, the Right to Information Act is frequently invoked by individuals to achieve their rights to food and employment by forcing governments to justify their activities and decisions.

Similar initiatives have also been adopted to promote monitoring by civil society, international bodies and other groups on how governments are spending to meet the goals. The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) supports the transparency of development assistance by both public and private bodies. Budget transparency initiatives are used by local communities to better track where money has gone.

But many countries still do not make information available to their people. Information about hospitals, schools, housing and water is held by government officials in secret while needs go unmet. In Senegal, an ARTICLE 19 project found most women in rural and disadvantaged areas were unaware about obstetric fistula, a dangerous condition affecting women giving birth until a recent campaign explained the condition and how to get treatment.

Setting targets

To build on these national laws and initiatives to promote wider accountability in all countries, access to information needs to be included in the new global goals framework for post-2015. At the centre of this should be a target for legal recognition in every country that individuals have a right to access information held by government bodies and others institutions relevant to their needs. At a minimum, this requires countries to adopt a framework right to information law which sets out minimum standards on the right of all persons to demand information, the duty of bodies to collect, store and provide information, and a set of specific limited exemptions, appeals mechanisms, oversight, and sanctions. The African Union and the Organisation of American States have both recently adopted model bills which can be used as benchmarks.

In addition, there are a number of additional international sectoral initiatives which can also be used as supplementary indicators, including implementation of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, compliance with the recommendations of the Commission on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health, and implementation of the UN Environment Programme's Bali Guidelines. Each of these examples is based on established standards that can be quantified and monitored.

Without the collection of, and access to, information, governments, international bodies and individuals themselves will not be able to assess and address the problems to be tackled by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The UN failed to address this in the MDGs. The mistake must not be repeated ■

MORE INFO

ARTICLE 19 is releasing a series of case studies this week for International Right to Know Day on using the right to information to promote maternal health, access to clean water, and a healthy environment. They will be available at www.article19.org

David Banisar is Senior Legal Counsel of ARTICLE 19, the global campaign for free expression and information in London, UK.

UN Member States need to put governance at the heart of post-2015

As a coalition of civil society organisations, we urge the member states of the United Nations to place governance at the heart of the post-2015 development framework. Transparency, accountability and citizen participation are integral to eliminating extreme poverty and promoting sustainable development.

The UN's global consultations, MY World, involving more than a million people, have found citizens' top three priorities to include "an honest and responsive government." If the post-2015 framework is to be credible with citizens, it needs to reflect this concern. Embedding transparency, accountability and citizen participation in the framework will help governments to build public trust and ensure more efficient and equitable public spending, while curbing the risk that public resources are wasted or lost to corruption. Specifically:

- Citizens need information on the availability and allocation of public resources and the results of their use, and they need opportunities to participate in policy, so they can hold governments to account and help to drive improvements in public services. We support the call of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the post-2015 framework for a citizen-centred "data revolution" to support effective policymaking and ensure that its results are trackable.
- For governance to be transparent, accountable and participatory, there needs to be freedom of speech, a legal right to information and an independent civil society. Time and resources need to be invested in ensuring that citizens, particularly the poor and marginalised, can play a meaningful part in the design, implementation and monitoring of post-2015. Otherwise, policies may be badly-designed and lack legitimacy with the people they are meant to serve, limiting their effectiveness.
- Strengthened governance should be the aim for all institutions whose work will affect the success of the post-2015 framework, including multilateral bodies and non-state actors, particularly from the private sector. They should also be subject to transparency and accountability targets: for example, there should be full disclosure of donor aid, private investments and corporate taxes.

We welcome the recommendation by the High-Level Panel that "ensuring good governance and effective institutions" should be a stand-alone goal of the Post 2015 framework. We also welcome the Secretary-

General's statement in his report, 'A Life of Dignity for All', that "effective governance based on the rule of law and transparent institutions" is an outcome and an enabler of development, and his call for a "participatory monitoring framework for tracking progress and mutual accountability mechanisms for all stakeholders."

Our views are consonant with the letter from the Open Government Partnership's steering committee, signed by Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, the Philippines, South Africa, Tanzania, the United Kingdom and United States, which calls for transparency, participation and accountability to be placed at the heart of the post-2015 framework's design through "simple, compelling and measurable goals and targets."

A goal on governance could be applied in ways which recognise distinct conditions in different countries: there are independent indices, review mechanisms and methodologies already in use which could help to set targets and measure progress. We would welcome the opportunity to offer detailed suggestions ■

MORE INFO

This statement was produced and endorsed by an informal coalition of civil society organisations which are working to promote issues of transparency, accountability and citizen participation within the Post 2015 development framework.

Members include: Cafod; Campaign for Human Rights and Social Transformation (Nepal); Development Initiatives; Freedom Forum (Nepal); Fondation Chirezi (Democratic Republic of Congo); Global Witness; Integrity Action; International Budget Partnership; Luta Hamutuk, Timor Leste; Publish What You Fund; the Society for Civic Development (South Sudan); Transparency International.

The letter from the Open Government Partnership's steering committee can be found online here: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/157622801/OGP-Letter-to-UN-Secretary-General>

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Paragraph 47: One year on

Gordon Hewitt

Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)

Included within the Rio+20 Outcome Document was an acknowledgement of the importance of corporate sustainability reporting as a tool for enhancing sustainable development - known as paragraph 47.

Whilst many stakeholders, including ACCA, felt that the paragraph could have been more ambitious, its inclusion keeps corporate sustainability reporting on the political agenda. Further to this, the governments of four nations – Brazil, Denmark, France and South Africa – have used the text as a catalyst for action on sustainability reporting by establishing Group of Friends of Paragraph 47, with the support of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). Since the Rio+20 Conference, the group's founding members have been joined by Norway and Colombia.

International perspectives on paragraph 47

In order to capture stakeholder and national perspectives, as well as levels of understanding of paragraph 47, ACCA held a series of focus groups in six countries around the world (Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, South Africa, UAE and the UK). These focus groups brought together experts in sustainability and corporate reporting, representing the corporate, accounting, reporting, investment and NGO communities.

Whilst the scale and scope of corporate sustainability reporting varied significantly across the countries visited, a number of common perspectives emerged from the discussions. Firstly, there was a unanimous view that sustainability reporting will help efforts to address global environmental and social issues. The impact of companies operating in the private sector is very significant, and businesses around the world have a crucial role to play in the sustainable development debate. It was commonly stated that you can only manage what you measure, so sustainability reporting is a key step in getting companies to operate in a more sustainable manner.

Secondly, it was felt that government-led action was an important means of improving the quantity and quality of corporate sustainability reporting as many companies would not attempt to issue sustainability reports without there being some form of regulatory or legislative requirement to do so. Regulations can be seen as a means of 'kick starting' wider adoption of sustainability reporting before companies begin to understand the reputational, commercial and performance benefits of doing so.

Lastly, it was felt that the final text of paragraph 47 was too weak to catalyse corporate action. The Summit had the potential to send a strong message to businesses around the world, underlining their part in sustainable development, so in this sense Rio+20 was a missed opportunity.

Corporate Sustainability Reporting, the post-2015 development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

While negotiations in Rio failed to result in a global policy framework on sustainability reporting, there is potential for stronger agreements to come out of the post-2015 development agenda. It is encouraging to see that the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the post-2015 development agenda, set up by the UN Secretary-General to advise him on the global development framework beyond 2015, has called for a mandatory 'comply or explain' sustainability reporting regime to be phased in for all companies with a market capitalisation above \$100 million equivalent.

With the convergence of the post-2015 development agenda with the development of the SDGs, all stakeholders involved in these intergovernmental processes need to ensure that corporate sustainability reporting is recognised as an important driver of sustainable development ■



pic: Marcos Orellana

MORE INFO

A full write up of the ACCA led focus groups can be found here: www.accaglobal.co.uk/en/research-insights/environmental-accountability/paragraph47.html

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Reflections on the UN SG's report on intergenerational solidarity and future generations

Alice Vincent
World Future Council

Activities across the UN system are running at full pelt as follow-up to the Rio+20 Summit continues and the high-level segment of the 68th session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) kicks off. One of the areas for attention during this session is the Secretary-General's report on how the UN should consider intergenerational solidarity and the needs of future generations.

The report, currently available in advance, unedited form is published on the UN Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform.

The report introduces relevant theories and philosophies to provide an informed and balanced narrative on intergenerational equity. The challenges and immediate concerns associated with taking account the needs of future generations are legitimately raised, however, the discussion always turns to the inevitable need for action. Tackling poverty for instance, to offer lives of prosperity and dignity, remains central not only for current but future generations as well.

Drawing upon the practical experiences at the national level of how the long-term view has been incorporated into existing structures and processes, the report rightly touches upon the distinction of such an arrangement at the UN level. A set of institutional options for the way forward within the UN system are explored:

- 1. A High Commissioner for Future Generations** (para. 63). An aspirational proposal supported by much of civil society, a considerable number of Member States and most prominently the Major Group for Children and Youth, throughout the Rio+20 process. The role of a Commissioner could include: acting as an advocate for intergenerational solidarity; undertaking research and fostering expertise on policy practices; providing advice and support on best practices and policy measures. A concern regarding adequate funding to resource the role is also raised (para. 64). This proposal would not anticipate a large budget and would require only a small office – certainly significantly smaller than the existing two High Commissioners.
- 2. A Special Envoy**, similar to a commissioner but with 'a lighter institutional footprint' is the second option (para. 65). The Envoy would be appointed by the Secretary-General and would promote and facilitate the engagement and full participation of all stakeholders in the UN processes related to intergenerational solidarity, reporting annually to the UNGA and at request to the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) – the new body for

sustainable development within the UN. However this option risks marginalising the issue, and the envoy would also lack independence from the UN system.

- 3. A recurring agenda item in the HLPF**, serve to keep the issue prominent within international decision-making and promote its integration within the sustainable development framework. This option raises fundamental concerns, as many have already convincingly argued that the HLPF agenda is already overloaded, with considerably fewer days of negotiation when compared to its predecessor, the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). In addition, the HLPF is also likely also to bear the task of dealing with the SDGs once they have been agreed upon.

A constructive, win-win alternative would be to establish a UN High Commissioner for Future Generations, reporting to the UNGA and working in tandem with the newly established HLPF. The High Commissioner could have a supportive role, facilitating a broader discourse to identify common interests of present and future generations. This position could help inform UN institutions and procedures to better engage and apply long-term thinking, strengthening programmes and policies to promote inclusive, sustainable human development for current and future generations.

On a concluding note, the report's final recommendation to invite Member States to consider the institutional arrangements for intergenerational solidarity at the second meeting of the HLPF in 2014 creates an unnecessary delay, particularly if no further thought is given to the proposals for implementation until next year. Governments should instead carry this agenda forward more promptly via a UNGA resolution, proposing arrangements and a defined mandate. Given the clear need to raise and remedy the question on how such a High Commissioner role could be financed, a UNGA resolution would be more appropriate.

As George Bernard Shaw remarked "We are made wise not by the recollection of our past but by the responsibility for our future." The opportunity to be a "wise" generation is here, by implementing responsibility for our future – a High Commissioner for Future Generations – into the UN system ■

MORE INFO

The SG's report on intergenerational solidarity can be found on the UN Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform: www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org

Revitalising global governance: Next steps in the process

Harris Gleckman

Benchmark Environmental Consulting

There are many contending constituencies today for the leading role in contemporary global governance. Traditionally nation-states working bilaterally or through the UN system assert they are in the leadership role for setting global norms. Since the Second World War, multinational corporations working individually or through formal or informal trade associations have considered themselves to be key, dominant actors in the governance of globalisation. Working autonomously or in conjunction with nation-states or multinational enterprises, leading civil society groups have created international platforms that have set the terms of reference for international affairs, often bypassing nation-states in setting global norms. And professional bodies, religious groups, and ethnic communities also have effectively asserted a role in global governance in certain fields.

On the nation-state side, however, there has been a functional inability to use the combined strength of governments to drive global policy decision-making. One of the key elements of this dysfunctionality is the fragmentation of the state-based 'multilateral system'. There are international organisations, regional organisations, sub-regional organisations and sub-sub-regional bodies. There are thematic organisations (specialised agencies), universal bodies – e.g. the UN General Assembly (UNGA) – and restricted intergovernmental bodies with leverage over other bodies (e.g. the Bretton Woods Institutions). Each of these institutions, whether based on a geographic area or a thematic topic, is disconnected from other similar organisations by design or by practice. For example, at the regional economic level, the over 40 regional economic cooperation bodies have no organisational base to share their experiences of globalisation, nor a platform to articulate their regional assessments of issues of global importance.

In June, the GA passed a UN resolution on global economic governance that may move to resolve some of the fractured and disconnected practices between intergovernmental bodies. This resolution was proposed by Chile and co-sponsored by more than 60 countries from all geographic regions. Chile's goal was to position the UNGA and the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) as a common communication centre for the various multilateral bodies on economic, social, and environmental issues. Ambassador Eduardo Gálvez of Chile facilitated the negotiation process.

The resolution addresses in a new way: (a) the role of the UN in 'inclusive, transparent and effective' multilateral economic governance; (b) the relationship of bilateral and regional trading regimes to the international trading system; (c) the role of developing countries in economic norm setting; (d) engagement of the UN with 'international

groupings that make policy recommendations or take policy decisions with global implications, including the Group of 20'; and (e) the role of regional and sub-regional economic bodies 'dealing with global matters of concern to the international community'. It also calls for elevating academia to the same level as civil society and the private sector as participants in UN dialogues on global challenges (f) and recognises – for the first time – a connection between the UN and the Financial Stability Board (FSB) and the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) in Basel (g).

Of course, the effectiveness of a soft law resolution is heavily dependent on how it is implemented. In the case of the global governance resolution, there are a number of avenues. Item (a) can be used in debates over the expanded use of self-interested and largely corporate dominated multi-stakeholder governance arrangements; item (b) can be cited by developing countries faced with pressure for new bilateral investment treaties and inter-regional trade agreements; item (c) is relevant for developing countries and civil society in the International Organisation for Standardisation and other Basel-based Institutions; item (d) is an open door for other non-G20 groupings (e.g. the BRICS countries, and the South African Development Community, etc.) to also engage directly with the UN membership on global economic matters; item (e) provides a platform for regional and sub-regional integration and policy bodies to have an opportunity to express their views on global economic matters; item (f) provides an opportunity for university-based policy research to be presented directly to intergovernmental bodies; and item (g) opens a door to break down the isolation of the Basel institutions and to engage with the universal membership at the UN.

Creating a convening space for all intergovernmental bodies through the General Assembly and ECOSOC can be a first step in strengthening multilateralism to address pressing globalisation matters and planetary environmental issues. The next step would be re-connecting the parts of governments which currently meet in legally separate organisations, developing relatively autonomous international economic, social, and environmental policies.

The next global governance resolution could well design a multilateral forum involving representatives of all the intergovernmental leaders of the UN, the specialised agencies, & the Washington and Basel-based organisations ■

This piece was originally published in the International Institute for Sustainable Development's (IISD) Sustainable Development Policy and Practice Guest Articles series. www.uncsd.iisd.org/guest-articles/

The whole shebang? Why achieving development and security means working on governance

Larry Attree
Saferworld

If the post-2015 framework is to have the overarching aim of ending poverty, before starting, we should recall the findings of the World Bank report, 'Voices of the Poor': that poor people around the world define poverty not just as how much money is in their pocket, but also as their vulnerability to insecurity, injustice, and the indignity with which they are routinely treated.

If we are listening to what poor people say, the world's future development framework should surely define ending poverty as in part a question of achieving more just state-society relations and guaranteeing people's security. When the High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda recognised peace and good governance as 'core elements of wellbeing, not optional extras,' they accepted this argument. But for those who don't agree, let's review some other evidence.

One argument put forward is that while conflict and violence are the most significant factors holding back human development, addressing a range of governance, justice and equality concerns does not necessarily lead to better development outcomes. But there are at least two important cases to be made to counter this. Firstly, in *Governance Matters*, Kaufmann *et al* consider the development outcomes associated with six governance factors: voice and accountability, political instability and violence, government effectiveness, regulatory burden, rule of law and graft. Their conclusion? 'As measured by these indicators, governance matters for development outcomes.'

Secondly, addressing governance, justice and equality concerns does seem to lead to less (financial) poverty. The Institute for Economics and Peace has found that for every ten places countries rise on its Global Peace Index, they experience an income rise of, on average, \$3,100 per capita. Higher placed countries on the Global Peace Index also have been shown to achieve better scores on a very wide range of governance and rights-related measures, including: political democracy, accountability, corruption, civic activism, and ability to express political opinion without fear. So the most peaceful countries tend to be less corrupt, have greater respect for Human Rights, and offer their citizens the chance to have a greater voice and civic participation.

Tackling the roots of violence

These findings suggest that if you do want to reduce violence, and you don't want to do this through a hard-line and short-termist approach to security provision, then you need to tackle the roots of violence – and most importantly to improve governance. Paul Collier finds that governance of natural resources matters for whether countries that have them remain poor, badly governed and conflict-affected.

The World Development Report 2011 draws on research by Fearon which finds that high levels of political terror in past periods increase the chances of current conflict, and Walter, who finds that significant reductions in the number of political prisoners and extrajudicial killings decrease the chances of renewed civil war by between two and three times.

The findings of a 13-country study by Thania Paffenholz found that while civil society can make important contributions to peacebuilding, the behaviour of the state is one of two key contextual factors affecting this. A wide range of quantitative studies have also argued a causal link between democracy and lower levels of international conflict. At the same time, other research shows that majority-rule (winner-takes all) type democracies that do not protect minority rights, have a much higher level of violence than inclusive democracies.

Relying on evidence not exceptions

The debate on whether democracy – or at least some form of inclusive politics – is necessary to reduce violence and achieve development is emblematic of a recurrent problem in the post-2015 debate. While some base their arguments on what is on the whole likely to achieve better outcomes, others counter this by raising examples of the 'exceptional state' – states such as Rwanda and Ethiopia that have achieved growth and remained relatively stable without improving their approach to accountable and inclusive governance.

However, exploring the evidence on this, the Center on International Cooperation emphasises three points:

- Democratic systems are not the only stable option – and rapid movement to democracy can be risky.
- Nonetheless, since the end of the Cold War, all countries that have lastingly exited from violence – with the exception of Angola – have done so by adopting an inclusive political settlement.
- In the end 'authoritarian systems have a shelf-life' – that is they tend to put their future stability and development at risk by following the authoritarian path.

The world's new development framework should not be framed on what is exceptional, nor on approaches that store up risks for the future. Instead it should encourage governance approaches that the evidence shows have the real potential to lead to lasting violence reduction and better long-term development results ■

This article is adapted from one that was first featured on the www.post-2015.org and www.saferworld.org websites.

Sustainability starts in the cities

Matthew Boms

Communitas: Coalition for Sustainable Cities in the new UN Development Agenda

“Our struggle for global sustainability will be won or lost in cities.”

- UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, April 2012

World leaders meeting today for the inaugural session of the High-Level Political Forum should also be aware of a new effort that has emerged harnessing the technical expertise that will drive sustainable cities of the future. Partnering with ICLEI, nrg4SD, UN Habitat, the Tellus Institute and the Ford Foundation, Communitas has launched to establish a participatory process to develop a goal on sustainable cities and human settlements, with appropriate targets and a basket of relevant indicators.

With so much at stake for sustainable development, why focus on cities? By 2050, the global proportion of people living in cities is expected to rise to 70 per cent. Moreover, six million people will enter the global urban slum population every year, unless significant improvements are made.

Cities are the engines of growth and centres of innovation, and as such they are poised to be the driving force of global sustainable development. But for them to contribute meaningfully to the eradication of poverty they will also have to provide better access to decent employment opportunities and adequate social protection systems.

Specifically, it is this onus that makes an urban Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) so vital. As the Sustainable Development Solutions Network's (SDSN) recent thematic paper has argued, 'By getting urban development right, cities can create jobs and offer better livelihoods... sound urban development will accelerate progress towards achieving [the wider] SDGs, including the end of extreme poverty.'

Yesterday this stance was further strengthened by the report delivered on sustainable cities by Mayor Kadir Topbas of Istanbul at a Special Event on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements. The report has suggested one 'stand-alone goal complemented by urban targets across other relevant goals.'

Given this emerging consensus placing cities at the centre of sustainable development, the ultimate vision of Communitas is to advance just, prosperous and sustainable cities as a key SDG. This will ensure that the overall process capitalises on the mega-trend of urbanisation in order to halt growing inequality and long-standing poverty within the framework of sustainable development.

That said, it is imperative that the adapted indicators are derived from technical data. If the SDGs are to follow through and improve upon the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), they should be founded on the basis of reliable and proven technical expertise.

Communitas has hence adopted a 'Task Force' approach for technical data on sustainable cities, drawing on an expert- and practitioner-led method. We are establishing work groups on different priority themes, with the eventual aim of establishing pilot projects in each UN region. This would bring stakeholders, as well as local, sub-national and national governments, together to test relevant targets and indicators adapted to the variable conditions of each pilot.

An SDG on sustainable cities will signal an important commitment from Member States and their local and sub-national governments, answering the high-risk, high-reward and unfettered mega-trend of urbanisation.

If this effort is to succeed, we must keep the city-region perspective in mind as the SDGs are formulated in the coming months. As echoed at the Special Event yesterday by Mayor Topbas, "A sustainable city is a precondition for a sustainable world." ■

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UN General Assembly events calendar

Date	Time	Location	Event	Host
Tuesday 24 September	08:15 - 09:45	International Youth Voices on Post-2015 Contact: youthvoices@worldwewant.de	Westin Grand Central Hotel	German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development with support from UNICEF
	09:30 - 11:30	Shaping coherent and collective action in a post-2015 world: how policy coherence for development can help improve global food security?	CR1, UNHQ	Italy and OECD
	10:00 - 13:00	Tackling the unfinished business: Accelerating MDG progress Contact: Renata Rubian - renata.rubian@undp.org	CR2, UNHQ	UNDP and the World Bank
	13:00 - 14:30	The Right to Education in the Post-2015 Development Agenda RSVP by 20 September. Contact: sherry@campaignforeducation.org or awilson@gce-us.org	Open Society Foundation, 224 West 57th St, New York	ICAE, GCE, EI, LACRE, ANCEFA, ASPBAE, ACEA, EAEA, ActionAid, IBIS, GMACL, OSF, Oxfam, DVV.
	13:15 - 14:30	Multidimensional poverty and Multidimensional Measurement of the Post 2015 development agenda Contact: John Hammock john.hammock@tufts.edu	CR-6, UNHQ	Germany, Colombia, CONEVAL, Mexico, and GMP Network
	14:00 - 15:00	MDG Countdown 2013: Girls and Women Transforming Societies	Ford Foundation, 320 East, 43rd Street	UKAid and USAID
	15:00 - 20:00	Global Partnership for Effective Development	CR2, UNHQ	Indonesia, Nigeria and UK
	17:30 - 18:30	Reinforcing Momentum to End Acute Malnutrition RSVP to Camille cgbender@actionagainsthunger.org	Bohemian National Hall, 321 E 73rd St.	Action Against Hunger, ACF Int. and UNICEF
	18:30 - 20:30	Visions and Voices for Human Rights: Integrating human rights into the post-2015 sustainable development agenda No longer accepting RSVPs. Contact: Luke Holland, lholland@cesr.org	Conference Room 7, NLB, UNHQ	CESR, IBON Int. and Amnesty Int., in partnership with Mission of Finland to UN and Mission of Argentina OHCHR
Wednesday 25 September	08:00 - 09:30	Getting to Zero: How a post-2015 agreement that tackles inequality and poor governance will finish the job of the MDGs	Hudson Room (2nd floor) at Convene, 730 3rd Ave, NY	Save the Children, co-sponsored by Permanent Missions of Benin and Denmark (tbc)
	08:00 - 09:30	Looking to 2015 and beyond: The role for anti-corruption and governance Contacts: Craig Fagan - cfagan@transparency.org; Aida Arutyunova - aida.arutyunova@undp.org; Steven Malby - Steven.malby@unodc.org	CR-7 (NLB), UNHQ	UNDP, UNODC and Transparency International
	10:30 - 13:30	The voices of people living in poverty in the post-2015 agenda: Inclusion, participation and dignity	Danny Kaye Visitors Centre, UNICEF building 3 UN Plaza, E 44th	Caritas Internationalis, CAFOD and Trocaire
	11:00 - 12:30	Health for the post-2015 development agenda Contact: Robert Hewitt - robert.hewitt@dn.mofa.go.jp	The Japan Society, 47th St, between 1st and 2nd Ave	Permanent Missions of Japan and France, World Bank, UNDP, WHO
	12:00 - 15:00	A Transformative agenda for SD in Nigeria and Africa: Lessons, actions and emerging perspectives Contacts: Emmanuel O.Oguntuyi - darexajik2005@yahoo.com; Ife Falegan faleganji@yahoo.com; Sering Falu - sering.njie@undp.org	UN Millennium Plaza	Nigeria
	13:15 - 14:45	Effectiveness and accountability in the post-2015 development agenda - lessons from the MDG experience? Contacts: Martina Metz - Martina.Metz@bmz.bund.de; Azani Tschabo - azani.tschabo@bmz.bund.de	Conference Room S -1522, Secretariat Building, UN HQ	Germany and Others (TBC)
	14:30 - 16:30	Inter Community in Reality: Towards a new platform for achieving MDGs and welcoming Post-2015 Development Agenda in Indonesia Contact: Hamong Santono - among@infid.org. RSVP: Nindi Sitepu - nindisitepu@mdgsindonesia.org	Ford Foundation HQ (TBC), NY	International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development, Ford Foundation, Oxfam
	18:00 - 20:00	Reception event to launch the recommendations of the Learning Metrics Task Force	The Ford Foundation, 320 East 43rd Street, New York, NY 10017	UNESCO and Brookings Institution
	18:15 - 20:00	MY World Partner Recognition Event and Award Ceremony	Danny Kaye Visitors Centre, UNICEF House	United Nations Millennium Campaign, UNDP, ODI and core partners
19:30 - 21:30	Lives on the Line: How can we save 4.6 million women's and children's lives in less than 1,000 days	Volvo Hall, Scandinavia House, 58 Park Avenue	Save the Children, World Vision, PATH, FCI	

Civil society vision for justice for post-2015

Leo Williams
Beyond 2015

Yesterday, representatives of governments and UN agencies had the honour of joining hundreds of members of civil society organisations from around the world to hear civil society voices from the national level on the post-2015 development agenda.

Over the last year, Beyond 2015, Civicus, GCAP and the International Forum of National NGO Platforms have convened civil society deliberations in over 40 countries. These deliberations consulted with thousands of people who shared stories about a basic denial of human rights, including lack of access to decent education, healthcare and jobs. These people spoke of their vision for a more just future.

At the event, decision makers heard these voices, loudly and clearly. Civil society stood together to say “We do not want an agenda that will keep us all busy for the next two decades, but replicates the economic and political power imbalances that perpetuate poverty, inequality and unsustainable development. We want to ensure a transformation that puts people and planet first.” (Cliona Sharkey from Ireland)

Voices from the national level highlighted four key values to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development within planetary boundaries: Human Rights; equality and justice; environmental sustainability; and good governance, participation and accountability.

Sharmila Karki from Nepal expanded on the inequalities experienced in her country, saying “Poverty continues to exist because of gender injustice, unequal access to resources and services, such as land, education, health and a lack of employment, and participation in decision-making opportunities.”

Encouragingly, we heard strong words of support from the governments of Sweden and Colombia, both of which reiterated their commitment to ensuring strong citizen participation in the creation, implementation and monitoring of the post-2015 agenda. These countries both issued a strong call, which civil society welcomes, for other governments throughout the world to ensure meaningful space for citizens, and their organisations, to engage with their governments at the national level. However, as Richard Ssewankiryanga from Uganda warned, “We need to listen to the silences and to the voices of those who can’t speak.” ■

Report on the UN Secretary-General’s Event on MDGs Success

Farooq Ullah
Stakeholder Forum

Yesterday, the UN Secretary-General hosted high-level speakers at an event entitled **MDG Success: Accelerating Action and Partnering for Impact**.

The event aimed to catalyse and accelerate action to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and speakers were invited to share concrete examples of scaling up success with an emphasis on the ‘how’ – bringing together lessons from partnerships across the spectrum of the MDGs, as well as from Secretary-General led initiatives and movements.

Speakers included numerous prominent individuals, including the President of the World Bank, the CEO of Unilever, Bill Gates, Heads of States from Peru, Ethiopia, and Norway, and key philanthropists. Most panellists focused on the need to couple initiatives and find synergies. It was stated that the potential for success lies within multi-stakeholder partnerships and shared agendas. For example, the Secretary-General identified the water-energy link as a key priority for sustainability and poverty reduction.

A call was made for African private sector to invest in the continent’s long-term future. While one panellist stated that Africa’s development would be based on the concept of Ubuntu, or ‘human kindness’, which to Africans means that my success is linked to your success.

Mo Ibrahim asserted that the power of civil society is huge. By leveraging change and demanding better governance, it can be a game changer. In addition, it was concluded that traditional overseas aid was no longer sufficient, and new, higher forms of philanthropy and private sector involvement are key to the achievement of the MDGs and any future global goals.

The Prime Minister of Norway stated that connectivity can drive social progress and help achieve the MDGs. But Sheryl Sandberg of Facebook noted that connectivity comes at a cost, and these costs must be reduced urgently. Bill Gates observed that only when all pieces of the innovation puzzle come together do we get the results we need, and at the same time, we need to make the victims of poverty and underdevelopment visible.

Overall, the event was aspirational and ambitious. However, when polled by one moderator, the audience was less confident of the successful achievement of the MDGs, particularly on maternal and child health. It was concluded there is need for greater optimism and a stronger focus on the achievement of the MDGs ■

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