



NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

CENTER ON INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION



**What Happens Now?
Taking the Post-2015 Agenda to the Next Stage**

Alex Evans and David Steven

October 2013

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“This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.”

Winston Churchill

The End of the Beginning

On the 25 September 2013, a Special Event on Achieving the Millennium Development Goals was hosted by John Ashe, the President of the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

In his opening remarks, the President described the MDGs as signaling “a landmark shift in how the world approached development, putting the poorest and most vulnerable at the heart of the global development agenda.”¹ He called for an acceleration of efforts to implement these “time bound and measurable goals” by 2015.

But the President also underlined the potential for a new development agenda to succeed the MDGs after 2015. “The international community is embarking on a process with the potential for global transformation,” he said. “This new agenda must not only tackle the unfinished business of the MDGs, it must go further – leading to a great overhaul in how we approach the planet and its people.”

The Special Event, along with other concurrent events such as the first High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, marked the end of the first phase of debate on the shape of the post-2015 development agenda. Of the many inputs to this debate, the most important have included:

- The report of the *UN System Task Team* (June 2012), which was prepared by experts from more than

¹This report is an updated version of one originally published in June 2013 and includes extensive updates and revisions based on recent events, reports, and consultations with UN member states and other stakeholders. It provides a guide for all those interested in the debate on the global development agenda that will replace the Millennium Development Goals, including those who have not followed the process closely.

50 UN entities and international organizations. It called for a new framework with goals along “four, highly interdependent dimensions of inclusive social development, environmental sustainability, inclusive economic development, and peace and security.”²

- The report of the *High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda*, which was chaired by the leaders of Indonesia, Liberia, and the United Kingdom and published in May 2013.³ The Panel proposed the new agenda should be based around ‘transformational shifts’ towards ending poverty; sustainable patterns of production and consumption; inclusive growth; peaceful societies and effective, open, and accountable institutions; and a new global partnership able to deliver the new agenda.
- The report of the *Sustainable Development Solutions Network* (June 2013), which drew on scientific and technical inputs from experts from around the world.⁴ It identified ten priority challenges based on its analysis that the world can now end extreme poverty in all its forms, but that widening inequality and social exclusion must also be tackled, while dangerous human impacts on natural systems threaten human development and security. The report also underlined the need for a new commitment to global governance and for action to direct rapid technological change to delivering sustainable development.
- The *United Nations Global Compact* report (June 2013) on a consultation with the global private sector, which called for the human development focus of the MDGs to be complemented by an increased emphasis on economic transformation, the institutions that

make development possible, and environmental sustainability.⁵ It proposed goals should be developed in four areas: poverty; human needs and capacities, such as health and education; resources (food, water and sanitation, and energy and climate); and the enabling environment (peace and stability, infrastructure and technology, and good governance and human rights).

- The *Regional Commissions* report which sets out priority areas for the post-2015 agenda from a regional perspective (see annex), with four major priorities identified: employment generation, including a focus on youth unemployment and the provision of universal social protection; tackling inequality, both for income and non-income factors; environmental sustainability, with goals in areas such as climate, natural resources, water, ocean acidification, and land use; and democratic governance, at global, regional and national levels.⁶
- An extensive public consultation (the *MyWorld* survey), which asked more than 1.1 million people to identify the issues that are most important for them and their families from a list of sixteen choices.⁷ Better education and healthcare emerge as the most important priorities in the consultation, followed by jobs, governance, water and sanitation, food, and crime and violence.

Drawing on these inputs, the Secretary-General submitted *A Life of Dignity for All*, a report on the MDGs and the design of a post-2015 agenda to the 68th General Assembly.⁸ He called for a universal agenda that would include concise goals and targets, a new global partnership to deliver these goals, and mutual accountability for achieving results. The Secretary-General identified six “transformative and mutually reinforcing actions” including the eradication of all forms of poverty, tackling exclusion and inequality, promoting inclusive and sustainable growth, building peace and effective governance, and addressing climate change and other environmental challenges. Goals should be “limited in number, measurable, easy to communicate and adaptable to both global and local settings.”

At the same time, intergovernmental discussions have begun in the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals.⁹ An outcome from

Rio+20 and chaired by the Permanent Representatives from Hungary and Kenya, the Open Working Group met four times before the Special Event and will meet a further four times before negotiations on goals begin in February 2014. Its progress report, submitted to the General Assembly in September 2013, emphasizes the need for an ambitious and transformative agenda that includes, but goes beyond, the reduction of absolute poverty. The new framework should include “a few aspirational goals that are easy to communicate... [and that] in the aggregate, represent a pathway to sustainable development.” Country targets would derive from these global goals, taking different national levels of development into account.

The outcome document from the Special Event draws together these multiple strands and represents the current ‘state of the debate’ on a new global development agenda. After what was, at times, a difficult negotiation, member states resolved to:

- Develop a single post-2015 framework that would eradicate poverty and promote sustainable development, while also promoting peace and security, democratic governance, the rule of law, gender equality, and human rights for all.
- Agree a set of goals that would apply to all countries, while “taking account of differing national circumstances and respecting national policies and priorities,” and respecting the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.
- Build on existing global agreements, including the Monterrey Consensus and Doha Declaration on Financing for Development, which set out six areas for financing for development (domestic resources; international resources, including private flows; international trade; financial and technical cooperation; external debt; and systemic issues such as international monetary, financial and trading systems).

This then – along with an associated road map – provides the basis for the next two years of negotiations, which will culminate at a summit for world leaders in September 2015. So far, the process has been characterized by a

high level of engagement from member states and fairly broad consensus on general principles. Senior UN insiders profess themselves happy with the progress that has been made and regard the process as 'on track' to reach a robust agreement. The second phase of the post-2015 debate will take us through to September 2014, when the OWG submits its final report to the UN General Assembly, while the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing, another Rio+20 outcome, is expected to report at the same time.¹⁰ The Secretary-General will submit a synthesis report by the end of 2014, although there are some suggestions he could do so as early as September of that year (see below).

During this period, member states will have to begin to move from generalities towards specifying goals and targets. Contentious issues will have to be debated, with countries clarifying their objectives, while also signaling where there is space for discussion on issues that are sensitive for them. Governments will also face intensified pressure from lobby groups, fighting to ensure 'their' issue is represented in the new framework. The hard work, in other words, has just begun.

The Big Questions

Over the next year, a number of substantive questions will be debated. Among them are the following:

- **What does universality mean?** There is a strong consensus that goals should be universal, covering all countries, not just developing ones, while the debate seems to have been settled in favor of having a single set of goals covering both poverty eradication and sustainability (although some least developed countries still worry that the focus on poverty will be diluted). Many G77 countries are especially keen to ensure what they see as an imbalance in the obligations created by the MDGs is not repeated. That said, a focus on absolute poverty is likely to mean that many goals are not obviously applicable to high income countries. More cynical observers would also suggest that member states are keen on universality while it creates obligations for others, but not when it implies significant changes to domestic policy. In this regard, a lack of engagement in the post-2015 debate by ministers of finance and other influential policymakers remains a cause for concern.
- **How will global goals/national targets work in practice?** Despite the calls for universality, there has also been much discussion of the idea that post-2015 goals should not apply rigidly to every country, and that each goal or target should instead be adaptable to countries' individual situations – perhaps as a 'menu' of priorities to choose from. On the other hand, such an approach would seem to be in tension with the logic of global goals that guarantee minimum standards to all citizens and there is concern that countries will fail to set themselves stretching targets. It could also make it hard to compare progress across countries.
- **How should poverty be defined?** The global/national debate is especially thorny when it comes to the headline poverty goal. The ambition to 'end extreme poverty within a generation' has strong political resonance and will help communicate the potential of the post-2015 agenda to a broader public. Many countries, however, point out that the \$1.25/day

absolute poverty line is not relevant to poverty in their country. The international community needs to decide whether to stick with the focus on the poorest provided by the existing poverty line, move to a higher line, or create a goal with different targets for countries at different levels of development.

- **What happens now on inequality?** Civil society has been pushing hard for a goal on inequality and many member states have also indicated that they believe inequality is a priority. The High-level Panel proposed that the new agenda should ‘leave no-one behind’ and that goals should be disaggregated to ensure that “no person regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, or disability [is] denied basic economic opportunities and fundamental human rights.”¹¹ Other constituencies, however, have argued for a broader approach to inequality, with some pressing for a goal on income inequality within countries (expressed, for example, in terms of Gini Coefficient or Palma Ratio scores). An income inequality goal represents significant technical difficulties, however, both in terms of the measure used and whether the international community has standing to suggest an ‘ideal’ level of inequality. It could also represent a red line for some countries: the United States, Mexico, Brazil, and South Africa all fall into the most unequal quartile using the Palma ratio.¹²
- **How will issues such as conflict and governance be handled?** Many countries – developed and developing – are strongly in favor of goals to ensure stable and peaceful societies and good governance and effective institutions. Conflict-affected states, in particular, are generally supportive of the need for a greater focus on effective governance and tackling instability, however, and much will depend on how strongly they lobby in support of a common position. This objective also resonates with those consulted in the MyWorld survey who rank an “honest and responsive government” fourth after education, health, and jobs. Some countries, however, are concerned by the securitization of development issues or threats to national sovereignty, and are reluctant even to consider goals in areas such as accountability or citizen security that would impose obligations on them.

- **How much ambition on sustainability?** Few, if any, member states are outwardly opposed to putting sustainability at the heart of the new agenda, with many calling for a full integration of the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainability. However, the Open Working Group’s call for a simple set of goals that “in the aggregate, represent a pathway to sustainable development” faces substantial obstacles. None of the major economies are currently developing sustainably and, despite some examples of bold and effective policies, there is little sign that their governments are prepared for a major transformation in their development model. Hard questions therefore need to be asked about how far a goal-setting exercise can further this politically contentious policy agenda.
- **What to do about climate change?** Climate change is the most pressing medium- and long-term sustainability issue, and has major implications for much of the rest of the agenda (poverty, energy, food, water, etc., as well as the nature of economic growth itself). In addition, 2015 is also the deadline for the negotiation of “a new and universal greenhouse gas reduction protocol, legal instrument or other outcome” to be negotiated through the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and with goals for the period beyond 2020 (discussed further below). Substantively, it remains far from clear whether voluntary post-2015 goals and targets can support a binding agreement through the UNFCCC, especially at a time when the headline aspiration of limiting warming to 2 degrees is both contested by vulnerable countries who would like a lower limit on the one hand, and by experts who argue that even the more modest ceiling will soon be out of reach.
- **How clear is the implementation agenda?** In focusing on social sectors like health and education, the MDGs prioritized areas of work where there was already extensive knowledge of what needed to be done: what was missing was the resources to do it. By contrast, it seems likely that much of the post-2015 agenda will lead towards areas of work where development actors are less sure of how to make progress, and more experimental approaches will be

needed – such as building capacity and accountability in fragile environments where outcomes are not easily delivered, moving to green economies, or promoting climate resilience. Consensus will be harder to achieve on the post-2015 agenda if doubts grow that it can be effectively implemented.

- **Is there genuine appetite for a new global partnership?** Many member states – middle income countries in particular – are looking for rich countries to make commitments that go far beyond conventional development assistance, especially in areas such as technology transfer and climate finance. At present, however, they are yet to boil their demands down into a series of clear ‘asks’. Rich countries, meanwhile, seem to have little to bring to the table in terms of new contributions to building a global partnership capable of delivering a much broader sustainable development agenda, while their failure to reach their existing 0.7% aid commitment rankles with the G77. Moreover, the interpretation of what the principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’ should mean after 2015 seems certain to continue to cause divisions between countries. Given the need for a broader partnership, with much greater inclusion of non-state actors, and means of implementation that go far beyond traditional development assistance, a richer debate is badly needed in this area.
- **Above all: what will be the political deal at the core of the post-2015 agenda?** The architects of the MDGs were clear that the new goals were ultimately a means to the end of rebuilding Official Development Assistance (ODA) flows after the ‘lost decade’ for development of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Accordingly, as soon as the Millennium Summit had agreed the ‘what’ of the MDG agenda, work started on preparing for the 2002 Monterrey summit on financing for development (the ‘how’). This time around, ODA and other financial flows will remain critical; but they will also need to be matched by a new relationship between rich countries and those whose economies have grown rapidly during the MDG era. So far, at least, there has been relatively little thought about what the key elements of such a partnership would need to be, or the political prospects

for securing them. We return to this question more fully below.

The Process from Here

As member states and other stakeholders wrangle with these questions of substance, they will also face the challenge of keeping up with a complex, time consuming and – at times – fragmented process.

The Open Working Group

Over the next year, the Open Working Group will continue to act as the main forum for debate on the post-2015 framework.

Initially, the OWG suffered from protracted wrangling over its membership, with some member states unhappy that it was restricted to 30 ‘seats.’¹³ This membership structure, however, seems to be proving a source of strength with most regions choosing to share seats between two or three countries. These groupings work differently, some work together to develop a common position on the issues under discussion and some do not. Moreover, the fact that any government can attend and speak at OWG meetings, whether or not it actually has a seat, is also being seen as a source of inclusiveness and legitimacy by some.

Between now and February, the OWG will complete what its co-chairs refer to as its ‘stock-taking phase’. Across four sessions, it will explore a number of contentious topics including:

- The needs and challenges of the poorest countries, middle income countries, and those facing heightened environmental risk such as small island states¹⁴ [sixth session].
- Sustainable consumption and production, and climate change [seventh session].
- Peace and security, the rule of law, and governance [eighth session].
- The relationship between the post-2015 framework and key macroeconomic challenges such as trade, the global financial system, and debt [fifth session].

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- The global partnership and means of implementation for the new agenda [sixth session].

At the same time, the co-chairs must seek agreement on how negotiations will proceed after February. They are already collecting informal proposals from member states for the goals and targets they would like to see included in the new framework, although it is not yet clear how goals will be presented or prioritized. The question of the role that experts will play also needs to be settled. Can robust goals and targets be agreed through a negotiation among member states? Or will external expertise be needed to help create and refine proposals for broader discussion within the OWG?

Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing

The Open Working Group will be complemented by an intergovernmental committee to “propose options on an effective sustainable development financing strategy to facilitate the mobilization of resources and their effective use in achieving sustainable development objectives.”¹⁵

The committee has thirty members nominated by the UN’s regional groups. The membership represents a rather unusual mix of independent experts, diplomats, and government officials from various ministries such as finance, planning, and international development. It remains to be seen whether this diversity will be a source of strength and will make it hard for the committee to make progress in considering some extremely complex topics. The committee has met once and four further sessions are planned. While its report is due to be presented to the General Assembly in 2014, some observers in New York continue to suggest that the conclusion of its work may be delayed until 2015.

An important question is how the committee will interpret its mandate. Three thematic clusters have been set up:

- Assessing financing needs, mapping of current flows and emerging trends, and the impact of domestic and international environments.

- Mobilization of resources and their effective use.
- Institutional arrangements, policy coherence, synergies and governance issues.

Work on the first cluster has already started and will be critical to determining how broad the rest of the committee’s work is. At the most ambitious end of the spectrum, the committee could pick up the OWG’s challenge to map a pathway to sustainable development and begin to explore the financial flows needed to meet this overarching goal. This would then allow the second cluster to make challenging proposals on how finance can be mobilized on a scale commensurate with implementing the post-2015 agenda.

In any case, the committee offers an opportunity to ensure essential analytical work is completed that will be needed to underpin a delivery plan for the post-2015 agenda. It also provides an essential mechanism to begin ensuring that ministries of finance become closely involved in the post-2015 discussions, complementing the work of ministries of foreign affairs, as well as the work of environment ministries on the Rio+20 agenda.

Agreeing the Goals

The President of the 68th General Assembly, John Ashe, has made clear his determination to use his term to ensure that his successor is well positioned to move towards final agreement in 2015.

Having successfully navigated the Special Event and the first High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the President now plans a series of events under the title “The Post-2015 Development Agenda - Setting the Stage.”¹⁶ This will include high-level events on the contribution of women, young people, and civil society to the post-2015 agenda; human rights and rule of law; and South-South and other new forms of development cooperation. Thematic debates will also be held on partnerships, stable and peaceful societies, and water, sanitation and sustainable energy.

The most important work will happen behind the scenes, however, as the President works to set up an intergovernmental negotiation track that will be launched in September 2014 and take over from the Open Working Group. He has also been asked to begin discussions on the organization of a summit in September 2015 at which world leaders are expected to reach a final agreement. These tasks will require careful coordination with the OWG co-chairs, in part to agree how firm the OWG proposals for the agenda should be, but more importantly to develop strategies for tackling in 2015 those issues on which the OWG is struggling to reach consensus.

The Secretary-General's Synthesis Report

In the Special Event outcome document, member states asked the Secretary-General to “synthesize the full range of inputs then available and to present a synthesis report before the end of 2014.”

The timing of this report is somewhat ambiguous. While some observers expect it towards the end of 2014, others are convinced that it will be produced before UNGA in September. While the latter option seems more likely, it is far from clear what value would be added to produce another report at this stage, given the negotiated status of the OWG report. A later publication might allow the Secretary-General to take stock, more effectively synthesize the OWG's report with that of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing, and provide leadership after UNGA and as the new intergovernmental negotiations are launched. Some believe that it might be possible to push the OWG and Expert Committee reports forward a few months to allow for an early synthesis report, but this timetable seems exceptionally challenging.

The 2015 High Level Political Forum

The High Level Political Forum is a new body established at Rio+20 as a replacement for the Commission on Sustainable Development, with a remit to “provide leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development...[and] a dynamic platform for... agenda setting to advance sustainable development.”¹⁷

The inaugural meeting was held in September 2013 and the Forum will now meet at head of state/government level in 2015 and every four years thereafter, with annual meetings at ministerial level. It is clear that the Forum could play a crucial agenda setting role and emerge as the apex body for providing high level oversight of the UN development agenda after 2015. There will also be an opportunity to draw on the expertise of other stakeholders, while ensuring the Forum remains its intergovernmental agenda.

It is far from clear, however, whether member states are committed to both the ‘high level’ and the ‘political’ character of the Forum. It is possible that they will seek to create another parallel institution as part of the post-2015 negotiations, or will simply allow the Forum to fail by not giving it a central role after 2015. Short- and medium-term questions over its role include:

- Whether the 2014 forum – at ministerial level – will make a substantial contribution to the post-2015 debate, perhaps as the culmination of the special events and debates planned under the ‘Setting the Stage’ umbrella.
- The extent to which the Economic and Social Council, under whose auspices the ministerial-level fora will be held, will use the opportunity to promote peer review and accountability for post-2015 commitments.
- How the 2015 leaders’ forum will relate to the post-2015 summit referred to in the 2013 HLPF outcome document (one option would be to merge the two).

A Conference on Financing?

One recommendation made in the High-level Panel report was that “an international conference should take up in more detail the question of finance for sustainable development.” Such a conference “should discuss how to integrate development, sustainable development and environmental financing streams” on the basis that “a single agenda should have a coherent overall financing structure.”

While the logic for such a conference seems clear, a harder question is when it would make most sense to hold such an event. One option would be to hold such an event after post-2015 goals have been agreed (the Monterrey summit was held a full two years after the Millennium Summit in New York, for example). A second option would be to hold the event during 2015, for example a few months before the September HLPF, when it could draw on the work of the Expert Committee on Financing Strategy and provide a strong signal that the proposed post-2015 agenda will be backed up with resources.

Given current uncertainty, it would therefore be useful if both the Expert Committee and the OWG were to consider what contribution a conference on financing could make.

The Other Post-2015 Agenda: Climate Change

Governments have agreed on a deadline of 2015 for reaching a legally binding new deal on climate change, for implementation in 2020. Just as in the run up to the Copenhagen summit, this will ensure that climate negotiations become an increasingly dominant item on the international agenda. This provides opportunities for integration with the development agenda, but also creates risks, especially if levels of distrust grow between countries from different regions and income groups.

While many observers believe that the two processes can be kept in their silos, experience shows that the lines are highly likely to become blurred over time, especially as heads of state become involved. September 2014, for example, will see not only the OWG's report but also a head of government level summit on climate change convened by the Secretary-General in New York. There will henceforth be two simultaneous discussions on sustainable production and consumption paths, each involving charged questions of equity and 'common but differentiated responsibilities.' It may make more sense actively to ensure these processes complement and support each other, than to allow tensions and contradictions to build.

The Politics of a Global Partnership Worth the Name

At present, many governments have yet to develop a firm position on the key issues. Capitals and missions in New York are not always aligned, while few ministries of finance have engaged with an agenda that has potentially profound consequences for national policy. Over the next six months, however, an inflection point is likely to be reached as a critical mass of countries begin to engage at a serious and senior level, with key areas of agreement and disagreement becoming more sharply defined.

Delivering success by 2030 requires engagement across the full range of economic, social, governance, and environmental issues, leading to a global partnership with genuine commitment to delivering sustainable development. This work needs to begin immediately, identifying where shared interests allow for new partnerships to evolve, and the 'stretch positions' that might allow compromises to be made. Governments will need to work first individually, and then together, to identify the boundaries of the possible if they are to build a post-2015 agenda with ambition, credibility, and purpose.

In 2013:

- *African countries have the potential to play a decisive role.* African countries have fast-growing workforces and need an economic transformation if they are to provide young people with jobs and other economic opportunities. Africa is also projected to be home to up to 90% of the world's poor in 2030 on a business-as-usual trajectory and hence has a strong interest in ensuring broad commitment to an 'end poverty' agenda.¹⁸ They therefore have powerful incentives to insist on 'getting to zero' goals that complete the unfinished business of the MDGs, while advocating for the policies, strategies, and investment needed to enhance their productive capacity. The region's conflict-affected and post-conflict states can also be expected to argue strongly for their needs to be taken into account. African countries still emit very low levels of greenhouse gases and are worryingly exposed to climate damages, and so will also continue to be important advocates of a robust

climate change deal that offers them fair shares of any global carbon budget.

- *Leadership from major powers will clearly be important.* In his 2013 State of the Union speech, President Obama said that the “the United States will join with our allies to eradicate such extreme poverty in the next two decades.”¹⁹ China made a decisive contribution to poverty reduction and to economic transformation in the MDG era and has indicated that it intends to be at the forefront of shaping the post-2015 agenda in a “cooperative and win-win spirit.”²⁰ In recent years, Brazil has demonstrated innovative approaches to inclusive development in areas such as food security and social protection, developing a model that is highly influential in South-South cooperation. India, meanwhile, is the single country that will most determine the world’s success in meeting its goals after 2015, given both the extent of its residual poverty and of its development opportunities. Europe, finally, is certain to play an active part, building on its role as a key architect of the MDGs. There is an unprecedented opportunity for these, and other, major powers to develop joint approaches to find common ground on the post-2015 agenda, even while they disagree on other geopolitical issues.
- *Middle income countries must decide what they want from the new agenda.* The political incentives of the poorest countries are clear, while OECD countries remain prepared to provide development assistance to help them reduce poverty, even if many do not seem willing to meet their 0.7% commitment. In addition, further concessions in terms of market access and technology transfer for least developed countries seem possible. It is much less clear, however, what middle incomes expect to gain from agreeing new goals, what their ‘asks’ from richer countries are, or what contributions they are prepared to make. Given that middle income countries – both large and small in size – remain a critical lobby for a universal agenda, a greater articulation of their priorities is essential to moving the agenda forward.
- *Any country, however, has the chance to exert disproportionate influence on the process.* Through its early advocacy for the SDGs, Colombia has demonstrated how ef-

fectively a single country, equipped with a clear vision and strategy, can define the post-2015 process. Many UN member states, especially smaller countries, will have their greatest chance to shape the debate if they make a contribution over the next six months, before formal negotiations start. Advocacy will only be effective, however, if governments, or broader partnerships that include civil society and business, can present cogent and compelling proposals that rise above the formulaic jargon that dominates UN debates on development and if these messages are carried forward by effective member state representatives in New York.

- *It is important that the Secretary-General himself sets out a vision.* The post-2015 agenda is, clearly, an essential legacy issue for the Secretary-General, drawing to a conclusion his advocacy on sustainable development that has defined his time in office. As well as publishing his synthesis report at the end of 2014, he needs to use the coming months to underline areas where consensus is forming and, in particular, to add his moral authority to the growing call to end poverty. He must provide reassurance to key UN constituencies that controversial issues will be sensitively handled and that there will be no attempt to make commitments before a firm consensus has formed. He could also begin the work of galvanizing the partnerships that will deliver key objectives after 2015, providing reassurance that the new framework is amenable to implementation. Finally, he should act urgently to begin to develop the analytical resources needed to support the new agenda, ensuring that member states have the data and evidence they need to make reasoned decisions on the design of 2015 framework.

Conclusion: The Immediate Action Agenda

Despite early momentum, the scale of the task in finalizing a post-2015 agenda, and agreeing a coherent set of global goals, should not be underestimated. It took a decade for the original MDGs to reach maturity, with two further years to finalize the targets themselves. Effective technical work will play an important role in providing a foundation for agreement, but ultimately the challenge is a political one.

Over the next six months, champions of a bold but practical post-2015 agenda need to tackle seven key areas for action.

1. Start with commitments to end poverty

Consensus on the need for a single universal agenda is now strong, but sustainability goals will prove much harder to agree than those on poverty. At its heart, the MDG framework is a poverty reduction framework, with large numbers of governments, development organizations, and civil society groups now aligned to its goals and targets. Any lack of continuity would have a significant impact on efforts to help the world's poorest people. Equally, many of the countries with significant numbers of people living in absolute poverty are keen to secure commitments that the focus on poverty will not be lost in a debate on broader sustainability issues where there is less international consensus. Ideally, broad consensus should be reached on provisional poverty goals in September 2014, for integration in the wider agenda as it is finalized. This would allow sustainability to be at the forefront of 2015's negotiations.

2. Integrate the political narratives on climate and development

For all the talk about integrating climate change and development, from the 1992 Rio Earth Summit onwards, the two issues remain largely separate in terms of their policy processes and the practitioner communities that work on them. But with both agendas due to reach key deadlines in 2015 – especially on financing – there is a significant risk that the two could perceive themselves as

competing against each other for the same resources. That would be a zero sum outcome in which both sides would lose. To head off this risk, policymakers in both communities should invest time in building a political narrative that shows why the two agendas are stronger together than apart: with a climate deal that works for development, a development agenda with climate fully factored in, and a coherent approach to financing both that makes full use of the vast potential synergies that exist.

3. Start thinking much more seriously about implementation

Business-as-usual will not deliver an end to income poverty by 2030, while many goals addressing other dimensions of poverty will be many times harder to achieve than the current MDGs (e.g. quality education, rather than simply access).²¹ The broader sustainability agenda poses even more profound challenges. New strategies are beginning to emerge for helping countries recover from conflict, but they are untested. The global jobs crisis has few easy solutions. Progress on climate stabilization and other environmental objectives is extremely weak. It is therefore essential that international organizations, and above all member states themselves, begin to develop the plans and partnerships that will underpin the new development agenda, turning a normative conversation into a strategic one. Without a credible route to implementation, political consensus is likely to prove extremely hard to reach. National models – especially those from fast-developing middle income countries – can play an especially important role in demonstrating what is possible.

4. Get underway immediately on harnessing the data revolution

At present, we lack the data to design a post-2015 framework effectively, let alone to set a business-as-usual baseline or monitor progress after it is implemented.²² The High-level Panel called for the establishment of a Global Partnership on Development Data to fill data gaps and galvanize efforts to set a post-2015 baseline. This work needs to start immediately, with a firm commitment to funding, staffing, and supporting the new partnership. Meanwhile, both Rio+20 and the Panel have proposed a

Global Sustainability Report, which has the potential to become a platform for forcing international institutions to collaborate on developing and disseminating the common data and analysis the post-2015 agenda will rely on. The first edition of this report is already in preparation, with a wide range of UN agencies and the World Bank already engaged.

5. Move now on the partnerships agenda

There is broad consensus that the post-2015 agenda will rely on new forms of partnership and will draw on new sources of finance. But outside a few sectors such as energy, little work has been done to demonstrate that it is possible to turn the rhetoric on partnership into reality. By building partnerships now, the UN will widen the circle of those with a strategic interest in the successful conclusion of the post-2015 negotiations, while demonstrating to all participants the potential scale of change that can be achieved.

6. Engage capitals

Foreign ministries have limited power in most governments, as do the environmental ministries that negotiated Rio+20 and dominate climate negotiations. As a result, very few missions in New York are able to articulate a strong position on post-2015 that has robust support from across government. It is therefore essential that cross-government debate is intensified in as many capitals as possible, with external support for those governments that lack sufficient analytical capacity effectively to consider the wide range of issues under discussion. While public and wider stakeholder consultation is, of course, important, efforts to engage key national policymakers can no longer afford to continue to be neglected. Regional efforts to agree common positions are also important, such as that led by the President of Liberia for the African countries, or early initiatives to develop a joint strategy for the Latin American and Caribbean countries.

7. Take the post-2015 debate outside the UN

Broad consultations have played an important role in the early stages of the post-2015 debate, but it is now important to build on this outreach. While some member states will resist this reality, it is inconceivable that the post-2015 agenda will succeed in its more ambitious objectives without active support from the G20, designated by its members as the “primary institution for [their] economic cooperation,” or from the major institutions of global economic governance such as the IMF and the WTO. In particular, it will be essential that the 2015 G20 in Turkey issues an unambiguous signal of consensus and support for a final agreement later in that year. Other international summits and meetings can also play an important role, such as the 6th BRICS summit in Brazil in 2014 and of course the 22nd African Union Summit in January 2014. Much broader civil society and media campaigning support will also be needed, especially at national level, making it easier for governments to put their differences aside and reach an ambitious agreement.

No one should underestimate the scale of the challenge in agreeing and implementing a post-2015 agenda that has implications for most, if not all, significant global processes, from climate change to trade, economic to energy governance, peace building to biodiversity. In 2015, the culmination of the post-2015 and climate processes will put multilateralism under unprecedented pressure, with potentially extremely serious fallout if outcomes cannot be delivered, especially in view of the weak outcomes from both Copenhagen in 2009 and Rio in 2012. The clock is now ticking. The world’s governments must engage in open and serious debate today if an ambitious agreement is to be reached in less than two years’ time.

Annex: Proposals for Goals

This table summarizes major proposals for post-2015 goals, or broader priorities.

High Level Panel	SDSN	Global Compact	Regional Priorities: Africa	Regional Priorities: Asia and the Pacific	Regional Priorities: Arab Countries	Regional Priorities: Latin America and Caribbean	Regional Priorities: Europe and Central Asia
1. End poverty	1. End extreme poverty including hunger	End poverty and increase productivity via inclusive economic growth		Promote equitable income distribution	Address the different dimensions of poverty and exclusion; reduce the different dimensions of inequality - income, geographical and social (gender, age, ethnic, etc.) - and promote human development	Address extreme poverty and hunger Bridge gaps in well-being, and inequities that perpetuate the intergenerational transmission of inequality	Eliminate extreme poverty in all countries of the region and further reduce relative poverty Ensure that public pension systems are actuarially fair, equitable and financially sustainable Ensure that social protection systems are well targeted and compatible with work incentives Address different dimensions of social exclusion and promote inclusive participation

High Level Panel	SDSN	Global Compact	Regional Priorities: Africa	Regional Priorities: Asia and the Pacific	Regional Priorities: Arab Countries	Regional Priorities: Latin America and Caribbean	Regional Priorities: Europe and Central Asia
2. Empower girls and women and achieve gender equality	4. Achieve gender equality, social inclusion and human rights for all (eliminate violence, monitor discrimination and inequalities, reduce relative poverty)	Achieve women and girls' empowerment			Ensure a more comprehensive coverage of gender equality and empowerment of women	Promote inclusion and effective participation by citizens in economic and social development, especially nurture gender equality and foster respect for ethnic and racial diversity	
3. Provide education and lifelong learning	2. Achieve development within planetary boundaries	Quality education for all					Provide incentives for sustainable production and consumption
4. Ensure healthy lives	3. Ensure effective learning for all children and youth for live and livelihood 5. Achieve health and well-being at all ages	Universal health coverage					Ensure access for all to decent education, health and social services
5. Ensure food security and good nutrition	6. Improve agricultural systems and raise rural poverty	Good nutrition for all through sustainable agricultural systems			Provide universal access to basic services and innovative mechanisms for more effective social protection		Contain the HIV/AIDS and multi-drug resistant tuberculosis epidemic in Eastern Europe
6. Achieve universal access to water and sanitation		Water and sanitation for all		Ensure access to basic needs, food security and sovereignty			
				Improve water resource management for sustainable development			

High Level Panel	SDSN	Global Compact	Regional Priorities: Africa	Regional Priorities: Asia and the Pacific	Regional Priorities: Arab Countries	Regional Priorities: Latin America and Caribbean	Regional Priorities: Europe and Central Asia
7. Secure sustainable energy	8. Curb human-induced climate change and ensure sustainable energy	Sustainable energy for all	Develop productive capacities and create decent employment Design mechanisms to foster economic transformation as well as inclusive and equitable growth	Provide opportunities for a better life in an inclusive and sustainable way Harmonize rapid economic growth with employment generation and environmental sustainability	Promote inclusive growth and structural transformation through industrial and agricultural policy Promote employment generation - including for youth and women - through the creation of productive jobs	Create productive employment and decent work for all Intensify the diversification of production Close productivity gaps between different sectors and strata of the economy, and in the area of social protection	Promote a more equitable distribution of income and wealth while targeting explicitly full employment Promote economic diversification in the production structure of the commodity-rich transition economies
9. Manage natural resources sustainably	9. Secure ecosystem services and biodiversity, and ensure good management of water and other natural resources			Improve energy access and natural resource management with particular emphasis on marine ecosystems Enhance ecological carrying capacity	Address climate change and sustainable natural resource management, and promote water and food security	Incorporate sustainable development principles into the policies and development strategies of countries	
10. Ensure good governance and effective institutions	10. Transform governance for sustainable development	Good governance and realization of human rights	Strengthen national governance mechanisms, institutions and capacities		Strengthen governance, effective institutions, democracy and the rule of law		Strengthen governance, democratic institutions and freedom of the press

High Level Panel	SDSN	Global Compact	Regional Priorities: Africa	Regional Priorities: Asia and the Pacific	Regional Priorities: Arab Countries	Regional Priorities: Latin America and Caribbean	Regional Priorities: Europe and Central Asia
11. Ensure stable and peaceful societies		Build peaceful and stable societies	Promote enablers, including peace and security, and infrastructure development Foster global security, which ensuring that security concerns do not crowd out development		Ensure human rights, freedoms and social justice in order to promote inclusive and equitable development End the occupation of Palestine; address the root causes and foster the resolutions of conflict and war, as well as their regional spillover effects		

High Level Panel	SDSN	Global Compact	Regional Priorities: Africa	Regional Priorities: Asia and the Pacific	Regional Priorities: Arab Countries	Regional Priorities: Latin America and Caribbean	Regional Priorities: Europe and Central Asia
12. Create a global enabling environment and catalyse long term finance (includes means of implementation and climate change)	10. Transform governance for sustainable development (includes means of implementation)		Develop a resource framework broader than aid, which would include mobilization of investment, remittances and innovative financing for development Increase domestic resource mobilization Address issues of climate change mitigation, adaptation and financing, disaster risk reduction, and the effects of climate change on rural-urban migration Improve global and regional governance, coordination and partnerships	Address the challenges of climate change and provide support specifically for SIDS and farmers Enhance resilience to climate change and natural disasters Provide the technology, financing and capacity building to support sustainable development		Promote a global partnership for development especially in the aftermath of global crisis Promote international development and cooperation and strive for the attainment of the ODA target of 0.7% of GNI Identify innovative sources of additional financing for development, such as taxes on financial transactions and tax havens Address climate change and minimize the loss of biodiversity	Enhance resilience to climate change and natural disasters Promote development cooperation with the region's advanced economies by reaching or exceeding the ODA target of 0.7% of GNI Encourage the region's middle income countries to become aid donors and play a larger role in fostering a global partnership for development
	7. Empower inclusive, productive and resilient cities			Promote sustainable urban development and transport	Act on the challenges and opportunities of rapid urbanization and migration		Promote sustainable urban development and mobility

High Level Panel	SDSN	Global Compact	Regional Priorities: Africa	Regional Priorities: Asia and the Pacific	Regional Priorities: Arab Countries	Regional Priorities: Latin America and Caribbean	Regional Priorities: Europe and Central Asia
		Modernize infrastructure and technology	Develop capacities in science, technology and innovation		Accelerate access to ICT and strengthen cultural dimensions, such as knowledge and skills Promote a comprehensive approach to youth development in its economic, social, environmental and political dimensions		
					Promote regional cooperation and integration linkages to help overcome intraregional disparities in levels of development and resource endowment		Improve regional cooperation and economic integration

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Alex has worked over the past year to support Unilever CEO Paul Polman on his membership of the High-Level Panel, and was seconded to the UN Secretary-General's office as the writer for the 2011 UN High-level Panel on Global Sustainability, which first proposed the idea of Sustainable Development Goals. He also currently works with the Center for Global Development on future global climate policy. He lives and works in Ethiopia.

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Their publications include:

The Future is Not Good Enough: Business As Usual After 2015 (Alex Evans and David Steven, background paper for High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, June 2013)

Goals in a Post-2015 Development Framework (David Steven, NYU Center on International Cooperation, January 2013)

Climate, Scarcity and Sustainability in the Post-2015 Development Agenda (Alex Evans, NYU Center on International Cooperation, 2012)

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Resource Scarcity, Fair Shares and Development (Alex Evans, Oxfam / WWF, 2011)

The World in 2020 – Geopolitical Trends and Analysis (David Steven, British Council, 2011)

2020 Development Futures (Alex Evans, Action Aid, 2011)

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These and their other publications are all available at <http://www.globaldashboard.org/pubs/>

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