Experts Group Meeting to support the advancement of the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda
New York, 27-29 February 2012
Summary of the discussions[1]
15 March 2012

From 27-29 February 2012, the Co-Chairs of the UN System Task Team on the post-2015 UN Development Agenda organized an Expert Group Meeting (EGM)with the objective of advancing discussion on some of the questions that will drive the design of a post-2015 UN development framework. Academics and researchers with expertise on development issues and leaders from civil society organizations were invited. The EGM drew participation from 45 organizations and entities within the UN System and 19 institutions ranging from academia to non-governmental organizations (see Annex 1 for a full list of entities).

During the three-day meeting, discussions were organized around five sets of questions:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the MDG agenda and its implications for the post-2015 agenda?
- What are the most pressing global development challenges the post-2015 agenda should respond to and how?
- How the global partnership for development should be broadened and strengthened in the light of these challenges and taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of the MDG agenda?
- What would be the best possible format for the post-2015-agenda to provide adequate accountability? What should be the common global goals and what should be left to national (and/or regional) level goals and target setting? To what extent should we be specific about the means to achieve the goals and targets?
- How would, and should, the post-2015 framework relate to on-going processes and already established agenda, like Rio+20, the energy for all initiative, the Istanbul Plan of Action for LDCs, among many other processes and initiatives?

The following **key messages** emerged:

- The core values contained in the Millennium Declaration remain valid.
- The post-2015 UN Development Agenda should reflect the urgent need for transformative change in order to achieve a more inclusive and sustainable global development.

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[1] A summary of the informal briefing with UN Delegates on 28 February 2012, that was part of the EGM, is reported in a separate document.

- The new framework should include concrete goals, targets and indicators. The focus on ends should be retained, but targets and indicators could also include elements to enable monitoring performance on policy efforts and processes.
- The outcome from Rio+20 should not be in conflict with the post-2015 discussions, as the post-2015 UN Development Agenda will not be decided in Rio. Instead, the two processes should feed into each other.
- Cross-cutting issues and emerging themes could be highlighted through goals and/or targets, and/or mainstreamed by embedding them into other goals and/or targets.
- More clarity is needed on how to best incorporate issues that are not easily measurable. The key question is how to apply new thinking on the analysis of emerging or seemingly complex issues, while maintaining a simple, transparent agenda with clear mechanisms for accountability.
- The global partnership for development needs to be redefined to make it truly "global", with a clear accountability framework for both developed and developing countries.
- Policy coherence both within and across sectors is important, but it was not entirely clear how to operationalize policy coherence at the national and international levels.
- Broad consultations should be held at all levels—global, regional, national and local.
- The UN should serve as a gatekeeper to prevent an overburdening of the post-2015 UN Development Agenda.

Key recommendations to consider for the definition of the post-2015 UN Development Agenda and the related consultation processes

Below is a summary of the main recommendations emanating from the discussions at the EGM, identifying areas where there seems to be general agreement and those where some questions remain to better define the common ground that would need to be reflected in the report of the UN System Task Team to the Secretary-General.

1.   The **core values contained in the Millennium Declaration** seem to be as valid today as an expression of the global development challenges as they were in 2000. The post-2015 development framework provides an opportunity to incorporate the issues that were not reflected in the MDGs, but were part of the Millennium Declaration, such as environmental sustainability, human rights, peace and security, inclusive politics, among others.

2.   The post-2015 UN Development Agenda needs to build on early and **broad consultations** with all stakeholders. The process to shape the post-2015 UN Development Agenda should: i) involve national consultations to include much-needed country perspectives, especially from the global South; and ii) make full use of all new available mechanisms such as social media and town hall meetings to ensure broad participation.

Related discussion: Voices at the local and country levels that need to underpin the setting of the global agenda must feed into the consultation processes. National ownership and accountability should be emphasized. The challenge of consolidating the variety of perspectives that will emerge from consultations requires further discussion. One idea is to select an impartial mechanism, so that the inclusion of themes is based on the merits of each proposal. There was some discussion on the idea of a gatekeeping

function, e.g., in order to guard against overloading the post-2015 agenda, or to ensure that each theme passes the test of clarity of concepts, availability of solid indicators and robust data for proper monitoring. Throughout the discussions, it was recognized that the UN system should come together and offer its collective expertise, rather than work as individual agencies to incorporate their own themes

3.   The post-2015 framework should retain a **clear focus on ends**. The MDGs were successful because they focused on human development outcomes within a framework of clear, concise and measurable objectives. Likewise, the new framework should serve multiple purposes; namely: as an advocacy tool, a guide for national and global policies, and an instrument for policy coherence.

4.   In the current global context, the post-2015 development framework should also reflect the urgent need for **<u>transformative change</u>**. For the new development framework to induce transformative change in the variety of country contexts, greater attention must be given to means and intermediate processes focusing on policy coherence, without becoming prescriptive and taking into account that national realities are diverse and "no one size fits all". In this context, the roles of the State, civil society and the private sector in development deserve further consideration. When formulating the new agenda, the challenge is to make sure that short-term measurement of results through concrete quantifiable targets and indicators does not compromise more structural, longer-term processes.

> *Related discussion:* In that sense, it may be necessary to include targets and indicators for processes that, while contributing to ultimate goals, are also desirable in and of themselves. Issues such as employment growth, better jobs for youth and women, social cohesion, and greater transparency and accountability should be incorporated as guiding principles. In addition, guidance on means of implementation could be monitored through performance indicators.
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> If targets and indicators on intermediate processes are incorporated, they should not be donor-driven, but selected as part of participatory national processes. Further discussion is needed on how to formulate principles that would give guidance for the processes to achieve the main goals of the agenda without becoming prescriptive.
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> Policy coherence both within and across sectors is important, but it was not entirely clear how to operationalize it at the national and international levels. It was recognized that the new global framework should enable developing countries to increase their policy space to allow them to implement macroeconomic policies oriented towards employment growth, economic stability and social cohesion. How to achieve this balance is less obvious and requires further thinking and discussion.
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> Institutional capacity for policy implementation at the country level was recognized as crucial to achieve results, but more clarity is needed as to what that agenda should contain.

5.   Based on the MDG experience, **the post-2015 framework should include concrete goals, targets and indicators**. However, further discussion is needed on which parts of the agenda should include such concrete goals and targets. Some participants felt that such issues as peace and security or human rights could be best addressed through specific goals and

targets; others proposed mainstreaming or other ways to reflect underpinning issues. In addition, there was agreement that the format should facilitate looking at the linkages across the various goals, but further discussion is needed as to how this should be done effectively, without loss of transparency.

> *Related discussion*: More clarity is needed in relation to best ways to incorporate issues that are not easily measurable, such as the impact of climate change or the provision of decent work. The key question is how to apply new thinking on the analysis of emerging or seemingly complex issues, while maintaining a simple and transparent agenda with clear mechanisms for accountability.
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> Cross-cutting issues, such as promoting human rights, coping with demographic dynamics and reducing inequalities, should be: i) highlighted through the selection of goals and/or targets, or ii) mainstreamed by embedding them into other targets and/or indicators. When concepts are not clear and there is significant risk of misinterpretation, not incorporating the issue in question may be the only practical solution.

6. For the reasons above, there is agreement for a **long time horizon** (say, 25 years or more). Further thinking is required on the possibility of adding intermediate milestones (say, every 5 years) to improve monitoring and facilitate learning, with an emphasis on South-South learning, and policy experimentation.

7. Greater flexibility to **tailor goals and targets to regional, national and sub-national realities** was widely recognized as an explicit characteristic of the post-2015 framework, making sure there is compliance with global targets and principles relating to sustainability, inclusion and equity, as well as with improving peace and security and fulfilment of human rights. Country and regional contexts matter for most development issues. If regional similarities exist, regional targets could be used. The post-2015 Development Agenda must be flexible and allow for national and sub-national policy space. Yet, further discussion is needed on the implications of this for the global partnership for development, especially in relation to global economic and financial stability and the trading system.

8. **Specific proposals were put on the table as new issues** that should be addressed in a post-2015 UN Development Agenda. Attention was drawn specifically to: macroeconomic stability, decent work, food security, inequality, governance, gender, human rights, demographic dynamics, urbanization, peace and security, natural disasters, science and technology, and countries with special needs. All issues were deemed important development concerns and were supported by substantial evidence. Major points from the discussion, in no particular order, included:

- Mainstream **inequalities** (in their multiple dimensions) with disaggregated indicators in the monitoring framework, including, for example, by gender and age. Indicators that are disaggregated will be necessary to draw attention to the status of specific population groups and sub-national patterns of development. More weight should be given to progress among the poor. There is need to strengthen national systems of data collection and improve international systems for data aggregation and standardization.

- **Demographic dynamics,** such as population growth and ageing, internal and international migration, and urbanization should be integrated into relevant targets in the post-2015 development agenda.
- One way to incorporate **human rights** into the post-2015 framework in the formulation of the goals is to use the language of human rights drawing on established instruments. The goals themselves could be selected based on such human rights priorities as social and economic rights, personal security and political participation.
- The patterns of economic growth matter. Macroeconomic policy must create the conditions for **stable and inclusive economic growth** to reduce poverty and inequalities. In addition, greater interdependence requires closer macroeconomic policy coordination across countries. Further clarity is needed on how to integrate these dimensions into the post-2015 framework and its implications for the global partnership for development.
- The post-2015 agenda should develop a more effective approach that addresses the lack of **productive employment and decent work**, and should include more and improved employment indicators. A policy portfolio that contains infrastructure investment, micro-finance, and social protection has proven effective to promote decent work and human development.
- Price stability is important to achieve **food security**. There was a recommendation to include mechanisms to encourage market transparency, investment in national food systems, household wealth creation, empowerment of women, knowledge and skills development to manage risks and increase resiliency to shocks.
- Human development is concerned with opportunities and choices as much as distribution of outcomes. **Governance** norms, therefore, must reflect principles of inclusion and participation, and promote transparent, accountable and capable institutions at national and local levels, as well as global and regional.
- Building **resilience** of vulnerable population groups, especially in the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS, and capacity-building for resilience should be recognized. Recognition should be given to strengthening mechanisms to reduce risks from potential disasters and vulnerabilities to external shocks.
- **Science and technology** has been a powerful source of global development, and it should be recognized as an important enabling factor. The need for South-South cooperation in technology transfer and development planning was highlighted.
- Considerations for **peace and security** should be incorporated as part of development strategies. Freedom from violence is an important development challenge, especially in conflict-affected areas.

Related discussion: While broad recognition was given to the importance of the aforementioned issues, more discussion is needed on how to incorporate them into the agenda without overburdening it and keeping it politically viable. This is one of the greatest challenges for the UN System Task Team when formulating its advice to the Secretary-General.

9.   There was general agreement that the **global partnership for development** needs to be redefined to make it truly "global" with a clear accountability framework for both

developed and developing countries. The post-2015 agenda should give greater emphasis to a truly global framework, with clearly defined responsibilities. Recognition must be given to a number of challenges that affect both developed and developing countries, including those related to the environment, population ageing, poor reproductive health and increasing levels of urbanization, among others. The post-2015 agenda should become a global contract for all partners, with goals and targets for developing and developed countries so as to better reflect the responsibility of all countries in a global, interconnected world, as well as the global nature of the issues addressed. The policy space to exercise the "flexibility" that countries should have to tailor the global agenda to their own realities will heavily depend on the enabling global environment. A new global agreement would require more symmetrical and uniform rules for international trade. For example, although uniform rules are sometimes not sufficient to enable poor countries to develop, there may be a case for positive discrimination (or affirmative action) to level the playing field across countries. Priority attention would still need to be given to LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. Further discussion is needed about ways to build these considerations into the new framework and its implications for the global partnership.

Summary of other related discussions

Sustainable development and Rio+20

The EGM included a briefing on Rio+20 and the proposal by Colombia and Guatemala to agree on a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs), with a follow-up discussion focused on the relation between the Rio+20 and post-2015 processes. It was clarified that the outcome from Rio+20 would not conflict with the post-2015 discussions and the post-2015 UN development agenda will not be decided at Rio+20. To that end, there was widespread agreement among stakeholders to work towards the convergence of the two processes with a view to arrive at one UN Development Agenda post-2015.

The participants also discussed how sustainability could be brought into a development framework beyond 2015. Three issues were considered important for sustainability: equality, human rights and good governance. However, some participants pointed out the trade-off between addressing inequalities and sustainable development, as the first may come at a price of the second. The goals proposed within the UN Secretary-General's *Sustainable Energy for All* initiative [2] were advanced as an illustrative example of how the three dimensions of sustainable development can be reflected within one theme: energy access covering the social dimension; use of renewable energy addressing the environmental dimension; and energy efficiency for the economic dimension. There was an overall call to highlight such interrelations when considering a new development framework.

Regional consultations

The UN regional economic and social commissions are organizing regional meetings, undertaking surveys and on-line consultations to outline the perspectives of their regions on

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[2] *Promotion of new and renewable sources of energy.* Report of the Secretary-General, A/66/306, (New York, August 2011), p. 3.

the post-2015 UN Development Agenda. A joint report of all regional commissions will be published in early 2013. At the regional level, only few countries have yet to provide country positions.

A number of topics have emerged so far by region.
In Europe, five issues have emerged: the need for a stronger focus on sustainable development; a focus on peace and security; social issues, including political freedoms and labor standards; migration and demographic trends; and gender and female empowerment.

A consultation by the ECA, in partnership with the African Union and NEPAD, found that the MDGs were still relevant and that most captured the policy priorities of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Additional suggestions included goals for promoting: i) transformation and sustainable growth (including employment, rural development, food security, reliable infrastructure, fair trade, among others); ii) education and technological innovation (quality and access to basic and tertiary education, vocational training, and technological transfer); iii) human and social development (gender, human rights, social protection, reproductive, maternal and child health); and iv) capacity development and technological innovation.

In Western Asia, some priority issues included: i) equitable and inclusive growth, with a focus on poverty and inequality; ii) social inclusion and social protection; iii) women and youth perspectives; iv) democratic governance and participation; and v) peace and security.

In the Asia Pacific region, urgent attention must be given to issues of inequality and resilience to shocks and national disasters.

Overall, there is need for greater focus on youth issues and perspectives in all the regions.