

Political processes and technical consultations for the development of the post-2015 agenda

Photo by Felix Kalkman

As the United Nations Millennium Development Goals will expire in 2015, the Joint Monitoring Programme of WHO/ UNICEF have set up various task groups to review and progress the “unfinished agenda” after this date. This info sheet describes the political processes and technical consultations leading to the goals, targets and indicators of the post-2015 agenda.

MDGS AND THE POST-2015 AGENDA

In 2001, world leaders committed their nations to a new global partnership to reduce extreme poverty and set up a series of time-bound targets with a deadline of 2015 (UN, 2013a). This resulted in the creation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Ten years into implementation, the UN organised the MDG summit in New York, USA, to review progress and discuss the post-2015 development agenda. From these discussions, a Global Action Plan: Keeping the promise: united to achieve the millennium development goals by the UN (2010) emerged. Its aim is to build on the strengths of the MDGs and to address its shortfalls, neglected issues and new challenges that lay ahead; or what has been coined the “unfinished agenda”.

This plan also committed to including various stakeholders (civil society, governments, the UN, private sector and business, academia and citizens) in the whole process.

Parallel to the development of the global action plan, several political processes and targeted consultations were also taking place to contribute to the global design of the post-2015 development agenda (Wijesekera, 2012). The two main processes established for the post-MDG agenda are:

A process driven by the UN member states that grew out of the Rio Conference in 2012 entailing a working group established through the Open Working Group.

The UN Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20, held in Brazil in June 2012 concluded with recommendations on the following: the development of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the post-2015 agenda, establishment of an Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, and the creation of links with the work of the High-Level Panel on post-2015.

The Open Working Group is complemented by the Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing and the High Level Political Forum. The Open Working Group holds 30 seats, shared by 70 member states, and is divided into regional groups. It is chaired by Hungary and Kenya (Mr Csaba Korosi, Permanent Representative of Hungary and Mr Macharia Kamau Permanent Representative of Kenya).

A process led by the UN Secretary General, including a High Level Panel of Eminent Persons in the “Global Conversation.”

UN system post-2015 task team

The UN Secretary General established the UN System Task Team to support system-wide preparations for the post-2015 UN development agenda.

Chaired by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), this team brings together more than 60 UN entities, agencies and international organisations.

It reviews the strengths and weaknesses of the current MDGs and supports system-wide preparations for the post-2015 UN development agenda. It also assists in the multi-stakeholder consultations led by Member States in a post-2015 global development agenda with analysis, expertise and outreach work. It is the team's task to compile and define post-2015 priorities.

High-Level Panel

The High-Level Panel comprises 27 leaders from politics, academia, civil society and the private sector, who are selected by the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. It is mandated to provide advice on the global development framework beyond 2015. It incorporates country consultations, and prepares inputs for the next formal MDG review round. The High-Level Panel last reported its findings to the Secretary General in May 2013.

Global conversation

Led by UN DESA and UNDP, global conversations involve organising broad-based consultations on country and thematic priorities. The UNDP has organised a set of 11 thematic consultations, including environmental sustainability, education, health, inequalities and water. Social media is used to bring various stakeholders and interested people into the conversation, and it is the group's task to analyse and synthesise discussions. A report with the preliminary findings from the national and thematic consultations was launched in March 2013.

The main outputs of these processes include the following documents:

- First UNDG report "The Global Conversation Begins" (March 2013)
- High-level Panel Post-2015 report (May 2013)
- Sustainable Development Solutions Network Post-2015 report (June 2013)
- UN Global Compact Post-2015 report (June 2013)
- Regional Economic Commissions Post-2015 report (June 2013)
- Water Thematic Consultation Report by UN-Water, UNDESA and UNICEF (August 2013)
- Second UNDG Report: "Million Voices: The World We Want" (September 2013)
- UN Secretary General's Post-2015 report

As a result of the above described processes the following convergence in messages and principles emerged:

- Leave no one behind: build on the MDGs and complete unfinished business.
- Focus on elimination of extreme poverty and reducing inequalities.
- Put sustainable development at the core.
- Transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth. Build peace and effective, open and accountable institutions for all.
- Forge a new global partnership: partnerships and innovations are key to identify and deliver on the agenda.

SUB-CONSULTATIONS AND LINKS TO THE JMP POST-2015 FRAMEWORK

The first attempt to formulate WASH targets and their corresponding indicators post-2015 took place at a consultation in Berlin in May 2011, organised by the Joint Monitoring Programme of WHO and UNICEF. This event brought together more than 70 WASH professionals, representing civil society, academia, professional associations, regulators, multilateral and bilateral agencies, as well as statistical and data collection experts and representatives from the human rights community.

Following this consultation, four working groups were established:

- Drinking water¹ - Led by WaterAid and IRC
- Sanitation - Led by the Water and Sanitation Program of the World Bank (WSP-WB)
- Hygiene - Led by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)
- Equity and non-discrimination - Led by the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR)

Each working group had to realise ambitious, yet achievable and measurable goals, targets and indicators. The groups developed a consultation paper and a measurability meeting was held in New York in November 2012 to review these. Some 30 experts in monitoring and evaluation attended the meeting, addressing technical questions of how best to monitor the proposed targets.

A consolidated proposal on WASH targets and indicators from each of the four working groups, published by WHO/UNICEF (2012) was discussed during the *Consultation on Post-2015 Monitoring of Water and Sanitation*, hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands. The set of indicators prepared by the WHO/UNICEF JMP are found in: www.wssinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/resources/JMP-A5-English-2pp.pdf.

¹ Membership of the Water Working Group include the national governments of Mozambique, South Africa, Madagascar, Ghana, Uganda, and India; donors such as the Inter-American Development Bank, GIZ, WSP; NGOs such as WaterAid and IRC; academia/ research institutions represented by the University of North Carolina, Eawag, ICF (DHS), German Institute for Human Rights, Oxford/ London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine; UN agencies WHO, UNICEF and UN-Habitat; and professional networks such as RWSN, IBNET and WSP.

DEBATES

There is consensus that water, sanitation and hygiene are a human right and key determinants of health, nutrition and education outcomes: “they underpin all SDGs and are critical to economic growth and fundamental to human dignity” (Fonseca, 2013). Discussion is still ongoing about what is realistic, but must also be ambitious enough to achieve the vision for WASH post-2015.

To achieve a balance between what is realistic and ambitious, the working groups agreed upon several assumptions and principles to guide the scope of their proposals for the SDGs. The assumptions and principles that guide the scope of the proposals for the SDGs are as follows (WHO/UNICEF, 2012):

- Targets should be formulated in the context of simple, inspirational vision, articulated around universal use of water, sanitation and hygiene.
- Targets should focus primarily on outcomes.
- Targets should reflect the human right to water and sanitation, and the concept of progressive realisation of rights.
- Targets should reflect the aspiration of both an increase in the number of people using water, sanitation and hygiene services, and improvements in their level of service.
- Targets are global and must be relevant to all countries.
- Targets should look beyond the home to schools and health centres.
- There must be a focus on the poor, disadvantaged and excluded.
- There must be a focus on the elimination of inequalities and inequities.
- The scope of the targets is not limited and can extend to what the working groups think needs to be regularly monitored and reported on in the water, sanitation and hygiene sector; recommendations will be made for a longer list of parameters in addition to those in the targets.

The following describes the main differences between MDG and post-2015 goals:

- The development of post-2015 goals assumes a more inclusive and broad-based approach, gathering contributions from various stakeholders: civil society, government, UN agencies, private sector, academia, etc.
- Post-2015 goals build on the strengths of the MDGs and have the clear advantage of not starting with a blank canvass.
- Inequity and sustainability in access to clean water and sanitation is addressed in the post-2015 development agenda. The MDGs did not specify the category of people that the goal should target, neither the service levels being delivered.

The consolidated technical advice from the UN System to Member States is to prioritise water in the post-2015 development agenda founded on the fundamental importance of water for both human beings and the environment.



Photo by Carmen da Silva-Wells/ IRC

Water is generally acknowledged as a limited, non-substitutable primary resource at the core of sustainable development in all three dimensions: social, economic and environment, and is recognised to have direct links to peace and security. Hence, water (security) features greatly in current debates in the formulation of the “highest priorities” in the post-2015 agenda and is fiercely advocated as a dedicated post-2015 SDG, with measurable targets and indicators. Some groups argue that while water issues indeed traverse other sectors and challenges in the post- 2015 agenda, especially as these relate to poverty reduction, education, equality, health, food security and energy – a traversal approach to water may undermine the search for an integrated approach to securing and sustaining water resources, and the need to address different and often, conflicting demand and uses of water. Additionally, such an approach also runs the risk for water and its different sub-sectors to be under-represented, and their issues, left and/ or inadequately addressed. Therefore, the prospects for inclusion of one water-broad and dedicated “water security for all” goal in the post 2015 SDG’s are looking positive.

CURRENT STATUS OF THE POST-MDG PROCESSES

On 25 September 2013, the President of the UN General Assembly hosted a special event on the MDGs to follow up efforts towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

To date, the first eight technical sessions of the Open Working Group has been concluded. These will be followed by five sessions focused on the political aspects linked to the post-MDG process. The Open Working Group is expected to finalise its report to the United Nations in August 2014.

These goals, built on the foundation laid by the MDGs, are meant to respond to new challenges. They are expected to achieve a balance between the three elements of sustainable development: providing economic transformation and opportunity to lift people out of poverty, advancing social justice and protecting the environment.

The special event in September resulted in the following:

- Renewed the call for accelerating global efforts to meet the MDGs.

- Called for a single post-2015 process.
- Clarified the process and road ahead.
- Plans for presentation to the UN Secretary General's report synthesising all efforts for the opening of the General Assembly in September 2014.

In the outcome document adopted by Member States, world leaders renewed their commitment to meet the MDG's targets and agreed to hold a high-level Summit in September 2015 to adopt a new set of goals.

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This information sheet describes the current developments in global WASH policies and instruments. It is a collaborative product of IRC and DGIS and was prepared by Audrey van Soest, with contributions from Erma Uytewaal, Roel Blesgraaf (SIMAVI) and Yaw Sarkodie.

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