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Towards a *Transformative* Post-2015 Development Agenda

Informal Member State Retreat #5
Tarrytown, New York, 7-8 November 2014

Summary

On 7-8 November 2014, the Independent Research Forum on a Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda (IRF2015)—a collaboration of leading sustainable development institutes from across the globe—hosted the fifth in a series of informal retreats on the theme “Towards a *Transformative* Post-2015 Development Agenda.” The purpose of the retreats is to provide an informal setting for open and substantive exchange of views on issues critical to framing the global debate on the post-2015 development agenda. The retreats have progressively looked at a range of issues at the intersection of poverty eradication and sustainable development.

This fifth retreat included participants from 30 member states, UN and World Bank representatives, and members of IRF2015. The governments of Colombia, Guyana, The Netherlands, and Norway supported the organization of the retreat.¹ The meeting was held under Chatham House Rule and addressed the theme of “A Renewed Global Partnership for Sustainable Development (GPSD).” It covered three inter-related topics:

- 1) Taking stock of MDG-8 lessons for a renewed GPSD and analyzing the key challenges and opportunities for implementing a transformative post-2015 agenda;
- 2) Identifying the underlying principles for and key elements of a renewed GPSD that is 'fit-for-purpose' to deliver on a post-2015 sustainable development agenda;
- 3) Analyzing challenges to national implementation of sustainable development priorities and implications for a renewed GPSD.

The following summary highlights key messages that emerged during the discussion.

¹ Financial support was provided by the governments of The Netherlands, Norway, and Switzerland.

Key Messages

The retreat provided participants the opportunity to reflect on the outcome of the Open Working Group on SDGs. Participants characterized the outcome as a ‘rough diamond’ with many strengths—rather than continuing to polish it, efforts should focus on how to deliver the agenda. Member states would need to come together with shared commitments in a spirit of trust and solidarity to make this a reality.

Learning from MDG8, discussions revealed a common desire for a GPSD that matches the ambition of a new post-2015 agenda and is fit-for-purpose to drive implementation. Participants emphasized that the post-2015 development agenda needs a global partnership commensurate with the goals and targets and with a clear focus on implementation. Some noted much of the agenda’s success will depend on the degree to which the global partnership can help drive action on the ground. However, participants also expressed questions about the shape and content of a renewed global partnership—what is ‘in’ and what is ‘out,’ and how it will be constructed in the intergovernmental negotiations. They noted that MDG8 and its targets left important gaps with respect to delivering the MDGs that provide lessons for the new partnership.

Multiple intergovernmental processes are deeply connected to elements of a global partnership, and additional effort is needed to ensure coherence. The potentially broad scope of a GPSD means there could be areas of overlap with the mandates of other major agreements such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, among others. Participants envision a GPSD that is coordinated and aligned with these other processes, including identifying where certain issues may be best addressed elsewhere. This requires a much more concrete understanding of how alignment will look in practice, and how the agreements can be mutually reinforcing.

ODA continues to play an essential role for many countries, and could be both increased and better targeted to maximize its impact. Participants described cases where ODA has been vital for their countries, and how their use of ODA has evolved to reflect changing circumstances and needs. ODA’s role and best use should be considered in relation to country typologies (from low to upper middle income countries), development patterns (e.g. level of urbanization, reliance on agriculture or manufacturing), the growing significance of global public goods, and other factors. Participants had differing views on whether and how the volume of ODA should be increased. Some argued that a broader agenda will require more money and so ODA should increase, while others pointed to weak economic growth and uneven political support in traditional donor countries, making additional public finance unlikely. There was broad interest in how ODA can best leverage new and additional resources, such as private sector investment or domestic tax revenue, to ensure the greatest development impact.

Beyond finance, participants also emphasized the transformative nature of trade, technology and capacity building, but questions remain about how each will be incorporated into the agenda. Participants discussed the critical role that trade has played in driving growth and development patterns in their economies – whether positive (e.g. opportunities to develop domestic industries through access to export markets) or negative (e.g. agricultural subsidies in OECD countries that make local products uncompetitive elsewhere). Similarly, technology and capacity building are critical to move economies up the value chain and to accelerate shifts towards more sustainable development pathways.

Participants stressed the importance of addressing ‘systemic issues’ to realizing the agenda, including global economic governance, the international financial system, and changes to business-as-usual patterns of economic growth. Participants felt that a major gap of the global partnership over the past 15 years was a failure to address systemic issues that can strongly influence the context for achieving development goals. This is particularly important for smaller countries where exogenous factors can play an outsized role in creating barriers to inclusive and broad-based sustainable growth. The international financial system and global economic governance were seen as areas needing particular attention.

New partners are crucial to the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, but current discussions lack a clear vision of what role(s) the private sector and civil society can and should play, how they will be brought to the table, and how they can be included in monitoring and review. Participants discussed potential private sector roles in the development agenda, including as employer and taxpayer, a source of finance and investment, and/or active partner in public-private partnerships targeted at development objectives. Civil society and local organizations have a critical advocacy role and, together with local governments, are on the front lines of service delivery. However, how non-governmental actors, particularly the private sector, will join the agenda and the extent to which they will take ownership remains unclear. Participants discussed the need for incentives and other enabling factors to catalyze private sector engagement, and the importance including the private sector and civil society in a review mechanism for the agenda.

A new GPSD will need a review mechanism to monitor implementation, assess progress against goals and targets, and enhance transparency and accountability. This will depend on development of new indicators, new sources of data and improved data collection, and strengthened institutional arrangements and capacity at multiple levels. To implement the agenda over time, decision-makers and stakeholders at global, regional, national and local levels will need timely, disaggregated and decision-relevant data to highlight what works and reveal where more attention is needed. Participants discussed how the High Level Political Forum might help to fill this need. However, significant work is required to build both the indicators themselves and the technical capacity to collect and analyze data in a way that is comparable across countries. Some participants also expressed concern as to how the system would respond in situations where progress was inadequate, and there was strong support for further discussion to build consensus on the meaning of accountability in the agenda and how to achieve it.

National implementation will require ‘contextualizing’ the post-2015 agenda, engaging across ministries and with multiple stakeholders. When put into practice, the post-2015 development agenda will look different in different places, depending on regional, national and local levels of development, priorities, and capacities. But in all countries adapting the agenda and preparing for its implementation will require institutional arrangements and processes to foster cross-ministerial cooperation and collaboration, engage the private sector, and empower local governments and civil society. For many countries, this type of engagement has yet to begin in earnest, but participants see this as increasingly urgent and critical to success.

Retreat Background Papers

Lessons Learned from Millennium Development Goal 8: An Overview

Sonya Suter, WRI

A Global Partnership for Sustainable Development: Essential Ingredients

Alex Evans, New York University/Center for International Cooperation

Kitty van der Heijden, WRI

Regional Perspectives on a Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

Masego Madzwamuse and Thabileng Mothabi, OSISA

With contributions from: Andrew Scott, ODI; George Varughese and Zeenat Niazi, DA; Karen Engel and Julio Berdegú, RIMSP; Nicole Leotaud and Tighe Geoghegan, CANARI; and Simon Høiberg Olsen, IGES

Independent Research Forum on a Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda

IRF2015 is a collaboration of leading sustainable development research institutes from across the globe that brings together a rich diversity of analytical skills and perspectives, engagement methodologies and networks. IRF2015 responds to the need for independent, rigorous and timely analysis to inform the evolution of the post-2015 development agenda and the concurrent intergovernmental process on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed to at Rio+20. IRF2015 partners envision a post-2015 development agenda that is universal in scope, takes an integrated approach to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of global development challenges, and can lead to more sustainable and equitable development outcomes for all.

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Centro Latinoamericano para el
Desarrollo Rural (RIMISP)

Santiago, Chile
www.rimisp.org

Overseas Development Institute
(ODI)

London, UK
www.odi.org.uk

Council for the Development of Social
Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA)

Dakar, Senegal
www.codesria.org

Research Centre for Sustainable
Development (RCSD)

Beijing, China
www.rcsd.org.cn

Development Alternatives (DA)

New Delhi, India
www.devalt.org

Stockholm Environment Institute
(SEI)

Stockholm, Sweden
www.sei-international.org

Institute for Global Environmental
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