

A Life of Dignity for All: Comments from IRF2015 on the UN Secretary- General's report

In July, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon released "A Life of Dignity for All: Accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015." As representatives arrive in New York for the opening of the 68th UN General Assembly, Peter Hazlewood (World Resources Institute) comments on some of the strengths, weaknesses and key questions from the report's treatment of the post-2015 agenda.

A single, universal development agenda, with sustainability and equity at its core

First, and perhaps most importantly, *A Life of Dignity for All* clearly articulates the need to put sustainable development at the core of efforts to eradicate extreme poverty and improve wellbeing — efforts that must integrate in a balanced manner economic development, social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

Reflecting the consistent calls from civil society, it recognises that only a single post-2015 sustainable development agenda informed by a multi-stakeholder consultative process can deliver the transformative change that is needed to eradicate poverty while respecting the limits of the planet's natural

systems. Crucially, the report responds to increasingly significant gaps in the MDG framework, in particular the need for a much sharper focus on tackling rising inequality that threatens progress on many fronts.

Clear commitment to the four elements of a transformative post-2015 agenda

While the global discourse tends to focus on 'the goals,' a transformative post-2015 agenda will require a more robust and comprehensive framework capable of translating aspirations into change on the ground. The report recognises that beyond an agreed set of global goals, the agenda needs a clear, compelling and unifying vision; agreed 'means of implementation' commensurate with the challenges at hand; and a participatory

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monitoring system to improve the quality and availability of information and to ensure transparency and accountability.

It explains the need for clear commitments and collaboration in order to achieve such an agenda, and acknowledges that implementing it will require a wide range of actors working together in new combinations — whether through multi-stakeholder partnerships, strengthened south-south cooperation, or other forms of collaboration.

Synergy with climate issues is underplayed

While the report acknowledges the importance of reaching an international agreement on climate change, it could better explain the potential for greater coherence between the ‘development’ and ‘climate’ agendas, and how this would especially benefit the poorest and most vulnerable, and should make aid and development massively more effective.

Approach to energy and environment still too narrow

The report makes only passing reference to the importance of energy — clean energy and energy efficiency — in delivering development gains and making the transition to low-carbon growth and development pathways.

Similarly, the treatment of environmental challenges presents the environment as a set of distinct resources, but this approach risks undervaluing intact ecosystems, the services they provide and the livelihoods they support.

As a bright spot, the report recognises both the threats and opportunities of rapid urbanisation. Critically, it draws a link between cities, rural prosperity, and ecosystem services as vital complements to one another. Making these

types of connections will be crucial for a successful post-2015 agenda.

The private sector will be critically important

The discussion of the private sector's role in a post-2015 agenda is largely limited to financing. However, it is time for the private sector to become a real partner in tackling sustainable development challenges, both as a driver for delivering and scaling-up development outcomes and as an advocate for development policies and investment.

Indeed, given the significant roles of the private sector in health, agriculture, energy, infrastructure and other sectors, as well as businesses' role everywhere in providing decent jobs through fair wages and non-discriminatory employment opportunities, maximising this potential (and curbing bad practices) should be a central feature of the post-2015 agenda.

What to watch for...

- ▶ The report calls for member states to provide clarity on the road forward to agree a single agenda. Will member states respond and establish a clear timetable and process for agreeing to a single post-2015 agenda?
- ▶ How can leaders of the post-2015 process ensure that the perspectives of the poorest — together with high quality ‘ground level’ evidence on the reality of poverty — are effectively brought into the post-2015 debate?
- ▶ The report calls for a “transformative” agenda that is to be universal. But the big question remains how to bring governments together so as to make consensus on a universal agenda achievable? This is a major test for the multilateral system.

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About IRF2015

The Independent Research Forum (IRF2015) provides an independent source of critical thinking, integrated analysis and awareness raising on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and a post-2015 development agenda. The IRF combines expertise across the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development. We are creating a compelling, practical and solution oriented vision of wellbeing for people and the Earth.