

IRF2015

Independent
Research
Forum



Towards a *Transformative* Post-2015 Development Agenda

Informal Member State Retreat #3
Tarrytown, New York, 6-7 April 2014

Summary

On 6-7 April 2014, the Independent Research Forum on a Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda (IRF2015) – a collaboration of leading sustainable development research institutes from across the globe – hosted the third 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 third retreat included participants from 34 member states, UN and World Bank representatives, and members of IRF2015. The governments of Benin, France, Guatemala and Switzerland supported the organization of the retreat.¹ The meeting was held under Chatham House Rule.

Retreats #1 and #2 focused on ‘unpacking’ key concepts, principles and approaches to forging an integrated and universal goal framework, including issues around universality and differentiation, the integrated approach, and criteria for goals and targets. Building on this foundation and the OWG Co-chairs’ revised “Focus Areas” paper, Retreat #3 addressed the theme of “*Towards a Transformative Goal Framework*.” Through presentations, plenary discussion and small group exercises, participants focused on three inter-related topics:

- 1) Unpacking a ‘transformative’ agenda—building consensus on the key dimensions of and criteria for a transformative global goal framework;
- 2) Applying criteria for ‘transformative change’ to targets and goals—defining and setting priorities for transformative targets and goals across a mix of “focus areas” including: (i) sustainable agriculture, food security and nutrition; (ii) water and sanitation; (iii) economic growth; and (iv) gender equality and women’s empowerment;

¹ Financial support was provided by the governments of Denmark, France, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.

- 3) Towards an integrated goal framework—exploring options for a common approach to moving from 19 "focus areas" to a coherent and manageable set of universal goals and targets.

The following summary highlights key messages that emerged over the two days of discussion.

Key Messages

Overall, retreat participants were optimistic about the work ahead, and while a number of challenging issues are yet to be resolved, the retreat brought to light participants' strong commitment to creating a post-2015 development agenda that is integrated, universal and transformative.

A transformative agenda involves both tackling new issues and addressing longstanding issues in new ways, including removing institutional bottlenecks and creating stronger results-based partnerships.

We need a global *sustainable* development agenda to address today's development challenges. A new development agenda must address new obstacles to equitable and sustainable development—such as growing resource scarcity and worsening climate change—and in ways that engage all stakeholders and mobilize greater capability to address common challenges. At the same time, a new development agenda needs to tackle more familiar areas where 'business as usual' approaches have fallen short, such as gender equality or education, using different strategies and partnerships to complete the unfinished agenda. In all cases, a transformative global agenda will need to examine the underlying impediments to development in order to deliver.

Further, participants emphasized the need to better examine interlinkages between the different dimensions of sustainable development in defining goals and targets. Participants were clear that a global agenda should inspire and guide, but also directly address national challenges. Investing in human capital and good global governance were cited as key, as well as creating an international enabling environment.

Transformative targets are not end points, but should set things in motion. Participants acknowledged that a huge challenge lies in designing targets that are specific and time-bound at the global level, but leave flexibility for national interpretation and action. Moreover, targets should reflect the basic criteria of being inspirational; easy to communicate; impactful on the overall goal; and able to mobilize action on the ground. Participants agreed that well-integrated targets can reinforce each other and create a positive feedback loop, and more integrated (cross-sectoral) approaches to implementation can help to 'unlock' broader and more systemic benefits. A holistic view also will be key—it is the whole agenda that is relevant, and looking at one single target will not achieve transformation. Several participants noted that the quality and availability of data will be a challenge.

Participants agreed on the need to ground the SDGs in local and national contexts and identified approaches and tools for doing so. There was strong support for a framework that is adaptable so as to be relevant for all countries, with recognition that the goals will be implemented mainly through domestic actions and national policies. This means connecting the international agenda to the political discourse within countries and bridging the disconnect between those who formulate global goals and those who will implement and be held accountable. Overall, there was agreement that the post-2015 development

agenda needs to be both integrative at the national and local levels, and integrated into country systems of planning and budgeting.

There is a need to consolidate without over-clustering. Discussions revealed that goals should largely cover three areas: unfinished business; emerging issues; and key enablers for development, which go beyond ‘means of implementation’ to address systemic issues. This in turn gave rise to several key questions, such as: Which are the cross-cutting areas? Which goals should be standalone and which should be clustered? How to decide on the total number of goals? How to design goals that are communicable, simple and aspirational, while also being comprehensive and transformational? Participants acknowledged the continuing need to ensure clarity on what is a goal, a target and an indicator. It was also agreed that goals and targets need to be designed with the long-term in mind by tackling underlying systemic issues rather than quick wins easily undone over time.

GDP can be a misleading approach to measurement and masks a lot of the development challenges that we face. This was a recurring theme at the retreat, with many participants stressing the need to go beyond GDP to factor environmental and social costs into public and private sector accounting frameworks. It was also pointed out that many development achievements are not visible in GDP, particularly in poor countries. Participants called for measures of inclusive and sustainable growth that go beyond GDP and can account for how economic growth impacts poverty and that internalize externalities, including resource depletion. Some suggested replacing GDP with a multidimensional metric that can serve as a better measure of development progress.

What gets measured gets done. Participants were clear on the need for empirical data and improved systems to measure progress, stating that this ties closely to accountability. They pointed to the need to set baselines in order to assess the level of transformation that occurs. Some suggested that each goal in the agenda should also include a requirement for data.

Innovation needs a greater role in the agenda. Participants were unanimous on the importance of innovation to achieving change, whether in technology, business models or institutions. The goals and targets should not only signal the importance of innovation, but should also promote it in concrete ways, such as calling for increases in research and development and to strengthen development cooperation in technology development, transfer and adaptation.

Looking Ahead

Participants reflected that while the MDGs succeeded in focusing international attention on poverty and ‘nuts and bolts’ development issues such as health, education and sanitation, this was a 20th century agenda. Now the world faces new and less familiar 21st century challenges such as climate change, growing natural resource scarcity, and social and economic inclusiveness that, left unchecked, will undermine efforts to eradicate poverty. A transformative development agenda will need to address these new realities. Some expressed concerns that much of the current work is focused on the old, unfinished agenda, and not the new one. Participants also emphasized that soon the conversation will need to shift from the ‘what’ of goals and targets to difficult issues on the ‘how’—and there will be a continued need for fora such as these retreats to provide space for open discussion and trust building.

Retreat Background Papers

A Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda: Some key concepts and an evaluative checklist for assessing targets and goals

Gitanjali Kumar and Mandira Singh Thakur, DA
Peter Hazlewood and Kitty van der Heijden, WRI

Grounding Post-2015 Frameworks in Regional, National and Local Contexts

Tom Bigg, IIED

Briefs on selected focus areas:

Focus Area 2. Sustainable agriculture, food security and nutrition

Sonya Suter, WRI

Focus Area 5. Gender equality and women's empowerment

Masego Madzwamuse and Alice Kanengoni, OSISA

Focus Area 6. Water and sanitation

Nina Weitz, SEI

Focus Area 8. Economic growth

Andrew Scott, ODI

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.

Caribbean Natural Resources Institute
(CANARI)

Trinidad, West Indies
www.canari.org

Open Society Initiative for Southern
Africa (OSISA)

Johannesburg, South Africa
www.osisa.org

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
Strategies (IGES)

Hayama, Japan
www.iges.or.jp

World Resources Institute (WRI)

Washington DC, USA
www.wri.org

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www.iied.org