



Women demand their rights at an International Women's Day rally in Bhopal, India.

PHOTO: SRIKANTH KOLARI/ACTIONAID

---

## Righting the MDGs:

contexts and opportunities  
for a post-2015 development  
framework

---

## Righting the MDGs: contexts and opportunities for a post-2015 development framework

**As the 2015 deadline for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) approaches, discussions about what replaces them are taking place in a fundamentally changed world to the one in which the original goals were conceived: different actors sit in powerful positions; new problems such as the worsening economic crisis and climate change demand attention, while hope for change comes from unexpected quarters such as new technologies, people's movements and progressive business. This paper sets out the key contextual shifts since the MDGs were developed, and lays out key principles and approaches that should guide a new framework in response to this changed landscape.**

Since the MDGs were agreed, the world has experienced a number of shocks that have had 'game-changing' impacts. From the 9/11 terrorist attacks to the financial crisis of 2008, and from the Arab Spring to climate change, the world is undergoing significant upheavals with far-reaching effects. Governments have changed how they do business with each other, diminishing the prospect of successful multilateralism; vulnerable people have been pushed further into poverty through war, resource scarcity and unemployment, while states have prioritised austerity and security over dignity and rights.

It is unsurprising that policy makers are looking for a follow-on framework to the MDGs given the scale of the problems posed by climate change, resource scarcity and an economic crisis, as well as the persistence of poverty and inequality. Predictably, goals are being mooted that acknowledge the interdependence of environmental and social effects on development. Big problems require well-resourced and collaborative efforts to tackle them. The MDGs proved remarkably useful instruments to rally around, providing focus for governments and other development actors in both rich and poor countries. A follow-on framework could therefore be invaluable for a world juggling multiple challenges.

However it cannot be assumed that a successor will automatically be agreed. A strong framework will come only from governments co-operating and showing significant ambition beyond what was agreed at the end of the last century. One promising development out of the Rio+20 Earth

Summit in June 2012 was the proposal to develop a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs), which would address environmental and social concerns in a single framework. This process is mandated by the UN General Assembly and an intergovernmental panel is being set up to take it forward. While the SDGs process is welcome, competing mandates and two sets of goals (SDGs and post-MDGs) would lessen the impact of both. Leadership is therefore needed from UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to ensure that processes around the SDGs and post-MDGs lead to a single development framework.

**The need to set new goals provides an opportunity to build on the strengths of the MDGs while addressing some of their shortcomings and reflecting on the socio-political, economic and environmental landscape of the first quarter of the 21st century.**

While today's problems may seem desperate, current contexts also bring solutions: youthful populations have become catalysts for democratic change; a more reflective business community can help promote sustainability, while emerging economies are rebalancing the global power map.

### Were the MDGs a success?

It is difficult to firmly gauge the overall impact of the MDGs and attribute progress on specific indicators to their existence. However, most would say that they have played a positive role in improvements to human development. Despite the uneven progress of some goals, the strength of the framework has been a focal point for governments, civil society organisations and business to rally round, precipitating increases in aid flows from developed countries, budget increases and new policies in developing countries, and galvanising new players to act.

Some of the specific targets that make up the goals have already been met or will be met by 2015, for example, halting the spread of AIDS, decline in malaria and achieving gender parity in primary education.<sup>1</sup> Other targets, such as completion of primary education, have seen significant progress in some countries, while in others, virtually none. Progress on nutrition is difficult to gauge as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has withdrawn estimates for 2009/2010 and is devising a new methodology for measuring this, reflecting some of the technical problems around quantitative goals.<sup>2</sup>

**"When our leaders met and agreed the MDGs they did a wonderful thing...they showed the world that we can and do have a common interest and that we as human beings can pursue the common good rather than selfish personal or national interests."**

Graca Machel, founder member of The Elders

One criticism of the goals is a lack of ambition: halving rather than eradicating hunger and extreme poverty, for example, still leaves a lot of people very poor and hungry even if it's achieved. The MDGs were also criticised for being too narrow in focus, and reductionist in their approach. MDG 2 on primary education, for example, was a major driver of increased enrolment in primary education but did not require concomitant improvements in education quality. Low levels of learning achievement in low-income countries are now the major concern of the international education community. More fundamentally, the MDGs did not address the root causes of poverty, most especially women's inequality, which made it impossible for the goals to be truly transformative. It is increasingly recognised that unless the structural causes of poverty, such as power relations, are addressed, poverty eradication will be impossible to achieve.

**Underpinning this failure to address inequality was the absence of a human rights based approach in the MDG goals.** Poverty and inequality arise principally because human rights have been denied, and if we are to end poverty then it is necessary to protect, promote and fulfil the human rights of people living in poverty. Poor people are the leading agents in their development process and when empowered are able to challenge unequal power relations – the root causes of inequality. Putting rights at the centre of a framework would help empower poor people to create more sustainable solutions to poverty.

Measurement of the goals, based on national averages, also masked inequalities by region or by gender, for example. By using aggregated data, countries or regions could claim success on their MDG targets even when large and distinct sections of the population failed to benefit from improvements.

Finally, the weak nature of the accountability required from rich countries was also a shortcoming. In a far more globalised world, with emerging economies growing in power, it is difficult to believe that a successor to the MDGs would have such a narrow remit. One strength in the proposal for the SDGs is that it is understood that these would be universally applicable.

### Environmental pressures and resource scarcity

The prominence of environmental pressures and resource scarcity above any other factor could shape the development

### A human rights approach to development

**There is increasing recognition that human rights are a cornerstone for achieving lasting development impacts.<sup>3</sup> This implies that rich and poor countries alike have to ensure that their development efforts are designed and implemented in ways consistent with their agreed international commitments on human rights. It also implies strong commitment to democracy, transparency and good governance, underpinned by multi-stakeholder dialogue. Key principles of a human rights based approach to development are:**

- Most fundamental needs are enshrined in specific human rights commitments. The associated mechanisms (such as UN treaties) offer a framework for shared accountability between development partners.
- Women's rights are central. Failure to address women's human rights will undermine efforts to eradicate poverty for both women and men.
- Democratic ownership and civil society participation are key to ensuring accountability. Citizens must have the freedom to monitor and track government policies and budgets. In turn, policies and budgets must be open to public scrutiny and debate.
- There must be attention to policies, practices and behaviours. Securing rights on paper is not enough, there must also be changes in attitudes and behaviours at all levels of society.
- Taking a human rights based approach means thinking and acting globally and locally. The causes of poverty or marginalisation might lie beyond national boundaries and all members of the global community have a responsibility to identify solutions that transcend national interest.

narrative over the coming decade. Human-induced climate change, the existence of which was still being debated in 1999, is already having serious impacts for all people, but most especially for poor women and men. Extreme weather events, which have become increasingly attributable to climate change, are causing droughts and floods, and are intensifying storms. Worryingly, the global response to the problem remains inadequate with the stalling of the UNFCCC process one of the most notable examples of the current breakdown of multilateralism.

With mitigation attempts failing, the possibility of global temperature rises exceeding the safer level of 2°C by the end of this century seems increasingly likely. Nineteen out of 20 of the countries most at-risk from climate change are low and middle-income countries, and poorer people will be most at risk of its impacts. Millions of people who have escaped

extreme poverty over the last two decades are vulnerable to the kinds of societal shocks created by extreme weather events and could easily be pushed back into desperate poverty unless adequate social protection is put in place.<sup>iv</sup>

Furthermore, climate change is increasing pressure on the world's already limited resources. As viable agricultural land becomes scarcer, land-grabbing by business and government is increasingly an issue, impacting on the rights for poor people the world over. Energy too is a more noticeably finite resource, with fossil fuel reserves becoming more expensive and dangerous to exploit, not to mention having serious impacts on the climate if used. Biofuels, which have been misguidedly touted as a solution to climate change, are putting increased pressure on land as fuel crops replace food crops. This too is squeezing poor people's access to land and increasing the cost and availability

**Felicitas Okwayo, 20, lives in Kibera in Nairobi, Africa's second largest slum. She migrated there from western Kakamega, because of poverty caused by political unrest and drought.**

"My parents have a small garden of about one and a half acres that my father owns. They grow maize, beans and bananas, but only for eating – there isn't enough to sell. When I was living at home I used to help them in the garden but things have got much harder to grow in the last few years.

"My father says that he has noticed a big change in the last five years, but first started to notice changes about 10 years ago now. The rains started to come much later, and then some years they just didn't come at all. So the rhythm of our farm changed. Because there isn't enough rain, or sometimes there is too much rain, there is no consistency and one can't plan when to plant. I came to Nairobi because I know that I have to earn some money to be able to help my family be able to eat every day. I feel bitter with the situation and how things are because they have no money and food is very expensive. With the increasing problems with weather and politics, the quality of all of our lives has deteriorated a lot."



PHOTO: KATE HOLT/SHOOT THE EARTH/ACTIONAID

of food. The food price crisis of 2008 for example was, according to the FAO, in part attributable to the widescale replacement of food crops with crops grown for biofuels.<sup>v</sup>

It's clear therefore that any new framework must address sustainability and energy use. This means finding genuine solutions for climate change and promoting equitable access to energy. It was hoped that some progress might have been made on these aims at the Rio+20 Earth Summit in June 2012. However the conference largely failed to produce any concrete outcomes except the initiation of a process to develop sustainable development goals. As long as this process merges with the post-MDG mandate this is a positive step. SDGs already address some of the shortcomings of the MDGs: they are southern led, would be universally applicable, and most obviously would place greater importance on the need to address sustainability in order for strong human development to be achieved.

But a new framework mustn't be limited to preventing environmental problems. It also has to deal with their impacts by guaranteeing equitable access to resources and ensuring that when shocks caused by climate change and resource scarcity occur, the vulnerability of poor people is minimised. A human rights based approach with an emphasis on social protection would be a major step towards this.

#### Financial crisis and economic downturn

The crisis in the banking sector has provided the other major shock of the past five years, leading to the deeper problems of economic recessions across northern economies and sovereign debt crises among European Union countries. In Europe and North America this has led to rising unemployment, increasing the numbers of people living in poverty and opening the door to cuts in public sector funding, removing social protection and access to public services, especially for the poor. Women have been worst affected because they are often in more vulnerable kinds of employment, and 'go without' when family budgets are reduced. For poor people in middle and low-income countries, the impact has been variable. Countries heavily dependent on foreign direct investment have experienced a reduction in trade, causing job losses and lowering incomes, while for other countries the direct impacts have been felt far less.

However for development efforts as a whole, rich countries' economic crises have been extremely impactful. Domestic economic issues have dominated national political agendas, leaving little space for development or other pressing global issues such as climate change. In fact the current crisis in multilateralism could largely be attributable to developed countries' economic woes. As the financial crisis spiralled in 2008 there was some hope that the G20 summits of developed and emerging economies might provide some leadership and co-operation on global financial issues, but this hasn't materialised. Furthermore the squeeze on revenues and new focus on decreasing national debts has put aid budgets under scrutiny, and in many cases seen them reduced. In 2011, no less than 11 EU member states cut their aid levels and nine are planning on reducing their aid further in 2012.<sup>vi</sup>

**However, with economic shocks come unprecedented opportunities for change.**<sup>vii</sup> More enlightened figures in business and government recognise that the current form of capitalism is not working and many are reflecting improvements that could be made. Calls for banking reform and a financial transaction tax are two such measures. Similarly business leaders are increasingly questioning the sustainability of business practices that don't take into account long-term impacts on the economic health of nations, or environmental impacts, and are asking shareholders to take a longer term view.<sup>viii</sup>

#### Shifting balance of power

The creation of the MDGs was mainly driven by developed economies, primarily members of the OECD Development Aid Committee. During the 1990s, northern economies still dominated most multilateral processes such as the WTO and UN, while the G8 remained the most important group of economic leaders.

Today's geo-political scene is radically different. Emerging economies including – but not limited to – the so-called BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) have increasing economic and political clout. In multilateral fora, the G77 group of middle and low-income countries have found themselves with greater influence. Indeed the suggestion of sustainable development goals came from the Colombian and Guatemalan governments. The 4th High Level Forum on Aid

**“We have to bring this world back to sanity and put the greater good ahead of self-interest... and fight very hard to create an environment out there that is more long term focussed and move away from short termism.”**

Paul Polman, CEO, Unilever

Effectiveness in Busan at the end of 2011 also recognised the changing economic balance of power with a greater emphasis placed on development cooperation between low-income countries and emerging economies.

Perhaps partly because power has become less concentrated and interests more diverse, global politics have become increasingly scrappy. Even as the problems which need to be addressed become greater and more urgent, it seems the international community is less able to agree how to do it. The stalling of the Doha round of trade talks, failure to agree a successor to the Kyoto Protocol and the lack of meaningful outcomes of the Rio+20 conference illustrate this.

However this picture doesn't need to remain so bleak. The fact that impetus for a new set of development goals has come from the majority world is positive and, although reaching agreement may be more tricky with the participation of many countries, a new set of goals should have more legitimacy and impact as a result of the involvement of middle and low-income countries in their creation. Furthermore, G77 countries are more likely to push for universally applicable goals, with action needed from northern as well as southern states.

A further potentially positive development in multilateral fora is the more helpful role played by business. During the 1990s corporate interests could be counted on to block attempts at progressive global environmental and social agreements but today some progressive companies are more supportive of human rights and sustainability frameworks, with some even supporting mandatory agreements.<sup>ix</sup>

### Changed nature of poverty

One of the key successes of the MDGs has been a reduction in extreme income poverty, i.e the numbers of people living on less than US\$1.25 dollar per day, but widespread, grinding poverty still persists.<sup>x</sup> Over 900 million people in the world continue to go hungry and, despite the success of MDG 1, almost 1.5 billion people continue to subsist on less than US\$1.25 per day. Furthermore, over 40% of people in the world live on less than US\$2 per day.<sup>xi</sup> Poverty therefore remains one of the biggest moral scandals of the 21st century.

The nature of poverty has changed since the MDGs were

conceived in the late 1990s. The majority of poor people live in middle-income countries and in cities, often alongside populations who have become richer during recent periods of growth. This kind of inequality is increasingly recognised as a problem which needs to be addressed. The World Economic Forum in 2011, for example, listed it as one of its top three priorities. Poverty is intrinsically linked to inequality and discrimination. You are far more likely to be poor if you are a woman, disabled, indigenous, lower caste, or from a particular region.

Discrimination, gender-based violence and gender-based disadvantage mean that women are disproportionately more likely to be living in poverty compared to men. A good example is access to land for agricultural production and food security. Women in developing countries currently have unequal access, control and ownership in relation to land, because of legal frameworks and customary practices that discriminate against them, rather than because of an absolute shortage of the resource itself. As discussed in the earlier critique of the MDGs, aggregated nationwide data often masks these inequalities and where, specifically, they lie. Furthermore, where growth has raised income levels for some, it has left behind those at the bottom of the pile, such as women, who face structural barriers to escaping poverty.

**In a world experiencing shocks, the nature of poverty in 2015 may be much more dynamic than before.** People living on the margins of poverty, perhaps having escaped extreme poverty through migration to cities, jobs created by new growth or access to services, remain vulnerable to economic crises, extreme weather events, or sharply rising food prices that could quickly push them back into dire straits. It would be naïve to assume that progress made against a few of the MDG targets is irreversible.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in fragile states,<sup>xii</sup> many of which have been affected by conflict. Here poverty is intensified as people lose assets, opportunities and access to markets. In these places the threat of violence and breakdown in the rule of law can mean that people are unable to claim their rights. Often the poorest and those who already suffer inequalities, such as women, are most at risk. Some commentators believe that, as per capita incomes grow and



**Vimu Gopal** lives on waste ground beneath a flyover near Okhla station, New Delhi, India. More than 300 million people live on less than US\$2 per day in India, while the combined wealth of the country's 100 richest people is US\$115bn.

PHOTO: STUART FREEDMAN/ACTIONAID

population growth rates lessen in middle-income countries, the majority of the world's poor will live in fragile states by 2025.<sup>xiii</sup>

It is clear then, that any new framework must address the persistence of inequality, otherwise the poorest, kept down by structural and cultural causes, may never be afforded better life chances. **This requires a transformative and human rights based approach, in order to remove those structural barriers and help people lift themselves out of poverty.**

Moreover, a new framework should be underpinned by the idea of a social floor – a minimum standard below which people should not be expected to live – and at which level they sustain dignity and basic rights. Social protection schemes, such as cash transfers to poor women and men may be one way to maintain the social floor, ensuring nobody

falls into dire poverty and protecting the vulnerable from shocks or more gradual changes to their circumstances. A number of emerging Latin American economies have recently adopted cash transfer schemes aimed at providing a financial safety net to the poorest. Schemes such as *la bolsa familia* in Brazil have been successful in reducing hunger and raising overall incomes.<sup>xiv</sup> Most developed countries have had these kinds of measures in place for decades. The cost of implementing such schemes – though not insignificant – should be weighed against the potential benefit of having more stable, cohesive societies and greater resilience to economic and environmental shocks.

### Changing nature of development finance

One of the most often-cited strengths of the MDGs is that they provide mutually agreed targets for governments to rally around, resulting in greater domestic political commitment

and resource mobilisation from developing countries, and increased and better-targeted aid flows from developed countries. In education, for example, the MDGs contributed to the drive to abolish primary education fees in 14 African countries, a dramatic increase in the share of budgets allocated to education, and a fourfold increase in aid to the sector.

Nevertheless, the approach was not without its problems, as it tended to position development as a simple issue of resource transfer from rich to poor countries and neglected to address other structural causes of poverty and inequality inherent in the global economic system. Although civil society organisations have sought to hold donor governments accountable for meeting their aid promises, they have also increasingly tried to draw attention to these other issues, such as IMF-advised neo-liberal economic policies and unfair trade rules.

However, for any post-MDG framework, aid flows from the traditional donor community will no longer be viable as the main source of finance for the achievement of new goals. As noted above, in traditional donor countries, economic downturn and cuts to public funding have meant that aid budgets have come under threat. The UK is just one of a small handful of countries where the commitment to give 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) in aid has remained intact. With countries such as Italy and Spain showing reductions of 38% and 53% respectively, it is clear that alternative financing sources will need to be mobilised to meet a new and possibly more ambitious set of goals. It also calls upon these donors to ensure that the available aid is made as effective as possible.

One major shift already underway is the appearance of middle-income countries in the aid 'scene'. Although the volume of their aid overall remains relatively low, the emergence of these actors is likely to lead to new challenges to the concepts and practice of aid – or 'international cooperation', the term preferred by the emerging donors in global fora. Some of these are welcome, such as their reluctance to impose conditions on recipient countries, and willingness to share skills and experience of successful approaches tried at home (e.g. Brazil has a programme working on sustainable tropical agriculture in Africa). However, the BRICs' unwillingness to be transparent about their activities in poor countries is more worrying.

Non-state actors, particularly philanthropic funds, have also become much bigger players since the MDGs were devised. Perhaps most famously the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation (BMGF), now worth a staggering US\$36 billion (more than the aid of Brazil, India, Russia and South Africa combined) has played a key role in progress on MDG 6 relating to reduction in cases of HIV/AIDS and malaria. However with this money has come increased power, leading to criticism that large, unaccountable funds are increasingly influencing public policy.<sup>xv</sup> In addition, the notion of 'leveraging' – using public funds to supposedly crowd in much larger private investments into development projects – is becoming increasingly popular within international institutions, but has been criticised for lack of transparency and accountability and having weak impacts on development.<sup>xvi</sup>

**Perhaps the most promising avenue for increasing the resources available for public services and state investment comes from domestic sources themselves.**

As poorer countries' economies grow, the middle classes swell and the private sector grows, meaning more countries should be able to raise their own revenues from taxation in order to fund development and poverty alleviation, including through tax revenues. This is a clear gap in sustainable development finance – and, in the context of establishing useful post-2015 goals, a measurable one. Most poor countries raise less than 15% of their GDP in domestic revenues – while developed countries typically raise 25 to 45% of their GDP. If developing countries could increase their domestic tax revenues to just 15% of their GDP, they could raise at least US\$198bn a year: more than the entirety of annual OECD-DAC overseas development aid.<sup>xvii</sup>

Four key areas of change are needed, in each of which major donor countries have a part to play. First, current international standards for international tax agreements and the taxation of international profits make it difficult for developing countries to prevent cross-border tax avoidance and evasion. Flexible standards that work for both developed and developing countries need to be set in an equitable international forum where everyone has a seat at the table. Second, unscrupulous corporate behaviour sees developing countries lose billions in potential tax revenues. Just one multinational company investigated by ActionAid avoids an estimated £20m in tax across Africa and Asia each year – sufficient to fund education

**“I will personally ensure that the fight for the empowerment of women is at the heart of the international process I am co-chairing to renew the Millennium Development Goals. Because we know today just how important that empowerment is for women, for the well-being of their families and the future growth and prosperity of the whole world.”**

David Cameron, UK Prime Minister, July 2012

for 250,000 more children in those countries.<sup>xviii</sup> Presumptive legal measures against corporate tax avoidance in national tax systems, as well as more transparent reporting of companies' tax positions and robust corporate commitments to tax responsibility, are needed to reduce such behaviour. Third, developing countries need political backing to resist pressure from business and capital-exporting countries for unwarranted tax incentives and tax breaks to foreign investors – arguably an even larger source of revenue loss than corporate tax avoidance. Finally, aid spent on building the capacity of developing countries' tax administrations to gather tax and pursue avoiders and evaders can have extraordinary returns: the UK's Department for International Development set up the new Rwandan Revenue Authority in 1998 with £20.5m in funding, alongside funding from other donors and the government's own resources. Rwanda now collects this amount in taxes every four weeks.<sup>xix</sup>

As with traditional 'aid effectiveness', a critical counterpart to boosting domestic revenues for poverty reduction will be to empower citizens to hold governments to account for their spending decisions, and ensure that revenues are transparently and progressively spent. With the potential revenues available, which could help end aid dependency, it is imperative that mobilising domestic resources through progressive taxation is fundamental to the financing of the post-2015 framework.

**Women's rights remain a major concern**

Despite the MDGs' partial attention to gender, some critics have attributed their shortcomings to a failure to fully account for the impact of gender discrimination and the huge structural and cultural barriers that stop women escaping poverty, for example gender-based violence. Failure to mainstream a gendered approach across the goals has created barriers to them being reached. For example, MDG 1 on hunger may have had a deeper impact if it had specifically addressed the issue of women's land rights, a huge enabling factor in the fight against hunger. It's also extremely concerning that one of the two gender-specific goals, MDG 5 on maternal health, is the most off-track. The United Nations Population Fund attributes this failure to the low value placed on saving women's lives by governments and the lack of women's political influence over health policy and spending.<sup>xx</sup>



PHOTO: JENNY MATTHEWS/ACTIONAID

**Mina, a widow, lives alone in Herat province, Afghanistan. “I live on my own as I cannot live with my daughters – this is not our culture. I am very poor and have no land and earn a very small income from cleaning people's houses. My life is very hard. I am always ready to die. I don't have a son or father or brother or husband to look after me.**

“I'm not sure that my daughters' lives will be better than mine. I would rather have been born a man. Women are beaten by their brothers and husbands and they can't earn much money or live on their own.”

**Failure to address the structural and cultural factors that bar women's access to services did a disservice to the MDGs.**

One crucial missing piece was a target on violence against women and girls (VAWG). VAWG is one of the most systematic human rights violations in the world and prevents women and girls taking opportunities that might otherwise be available, limiting their options to escape poverty.

Its existence therefore significantly undermines progress towards all the development goals, thus making them impossible to achieve unless tackled. For example, whilst MDG 2 had some success in increasing school places, the fact that 60 million girls worldwide are assaulted travelling to and from school<sup>xvi</sup> makes access to those places for girls difficult.

In conflict areas and fragile states, gender-based violence is major concern. A recent ActionAid survey in Afghanistan, for example, found that the biggest fear among female respondents under 30 is sexual assault.<sup>xvii</sup> Even in countries that have benefited from growth and where poverty overall has been reduced, less stable areas – for example so called ‘feral cities’ like Tijuana in Mexico – violence against women is commonplace.

Women are also becoming the losers within new aid frameworks. Less aid is being given directly to civil society organisations and channelled instead through the private sector or national governments, which often lack a women’s rights approach, meaning that gender programming is lost.

Many of the other factors already discussed in this paper, for example the impact of shocks, will have a disproportionate impact on women. Women and girls are systematically and deliberately denied resources, access to decision making power and are subjected to violence. This vulnerable position means climate change impacts and resource scarcity are likely to push them further into poverty and put them more at risk of violence.

Women and girls are far more likely to be poor, hungry and illiterate, and so they face a development emergency. The structural causes of poverty mean that only a development framework that aims to transform power relations can be successful in helping women escape poverty. Setting targets for access to services, for example, will not be enough. The post-MDG framework must be brave enough to acknowledge this.

### Ways forward

ActionAid supports a consultative process for the development of the post-MDG framework and strongly encourages members of the High-Level Panel, particularly its

chairs, to take opportunities to listen to the voices of people living in poverty as they develop the new framework. A workable framework will only come out of a process that has been truly inclusive and empowered poor people to participate.

Secondly, it should be reiterated that the twin mandates on SDGs and Beyond-2015 must be carefully managed to prevent the development of competing frameworks. The scale of 21st century problems of poverty, inequality and environmental degradation require global focus via one ambitious framework.

Given what we’ve learnt from the MDGs and the shift in global contexts, ActionAid proposes that any new framework takes account of the following factors.

#### Human rights, equality and gender

ActionAid believes the new framework should have a human rights based approach that addresses the root causes of poverty. This in itself will help ensure that the post-2015 framework tackles exclusion and inequality – not just poverty. However, a goal on inequality may also be necessary to cement this. The inequality perspective must not only be central to any new development framework, but also it must view unequal distribution of development outcomes as unacceptable. Furthermore the importance of women’s rights as an enabler or block to development means that gender deserves a stand-alone goal. Unlike other inequalities often experienced by minorities, women make up the majority of the population yet still find themselves discriminated against – their vulnerability maintained by structural and cultural factors. Policy makers need to recognise that having a gender goal does not preclude having a separate goal that addresses other forms of inequality.

#### Reassert MDGs that have not been met – and ramp up ambition

Rather than shifting the agenda completely, goals that have not been met should be renewed and reframed with greater ambition to see them achieved. For example, there should be a renewed education goal that addresses quality as well as access, and goals on poverty and hunger should aim higher. Poverty remains a modern-day scandal and nothing less than its eradication should be the aim of the new framework.

#### Environmental sustainability

Sustainable development should be a genuine integration of poverty and environmental concerns. Many environmental issues are of great significance to people living in poverty, and as collective international efforts are key to delivering change, they should be a core element of a post-2015 framework.

#### Universality, adaptability and accountability

Unlike the MDGs, a new framework should include commitments embedded for all countries – developing or developed. However there must be some flexibility in how goals are applied and delivered to allow for contextualisation (e.g. Bangladesh in comparison to China). Any new framework should provide space for innovative, localised solutions and alternatives, and guidance to locally identified policies, strategies, goals and indicators. To allow adaptability while remaining robust, the post-2015 framework must be backed up by strong accountability mechanisms. Currently a country’s performance at reaching the MDGs is an unreliable guide to how well they have responded to their obligations. If there are to be new global development targets there must be a mechanism that fosters accountability, not only to a governing body but to the people for whom these targets have been created.

#### New financing

There is a widespread acceptance that the next global framework will have to be less reliant on traditional aid inputs. There is more space for new and more sustainable financing, including from progressive domestic taxation within developing countries, and from preventing international tax evasion and avoidance by multinational companies and wealthy individuals.

#### Conclusion

The opportunity to agree a new set of development goals is one that should not go to waste. The world in the first quarter of the 21st century faces challenges that can only be dealt with through collective action. Everyone will be affected by failure, but poor people – especially women – will be hit hardest. The complexity of today’s multi-polar world, beset by competing problems, means that agreeing a new framework will be no small feat. However the potential gains in terms of security, well-being and justice are too great not to warrant the effort. The formulation of a set of strong and ambitious

development goals could put the world on a pathway to a sustainable future free of the most unjust forms of poverty and inequality.

<sup>i</sup> Evans, A. et al. Beyond the Millennium Development Goals: Agreeing to a Post-2015 Development Framework. Managing Global Order, USA, 2012

<sup>ii</sup> Op.cit.

<sup>iii</sup> See, for example, the Busan Partnership Declaration (para 3)

<sup>iv</sup> Melamed, C. After 2015: Contexts, politics and processes for a post-2015 global agreement on development. ODI, London, 2012. p.26

<sup>v</sup> www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\_upload/foodclimate/HLCdocs/HLC08-inf-3-E.pdf (accessed 10/8/12)

<sup>vi</sup> Aidwatch 2012. Aid We Can. Concord, Brussels, 2012

<sup>vii</sup> Evans, A. 2020 Development Futures ActionAid, London, 2012. p.5

<sup>viii</sup> E.g. Paul Polman, CEO of Unilever

<sup>ix</sup> E.g. Unilever supports a binding global climate treaty to limit global temperature rises to below 2 degrees centigrade. See Unilever’s Rio+20 Policy Manifesto. Unilever, London, 2012

<sup>x</sup> Melamed, C. After 2015: Contexts, politics and processes for a post-2015 global agreement on development. ODI, London, 2012. p.10

<sup>xi</sup> http://iresearch.worldbank.org/PovcalNet/index.htm?1 (accessed 8/8/12)

<sup>xii</sup> According to the World Bank “fragile states” is the term used for countries facing particularly severe development challenges: weak institutional capacity, poor governance, and political instability. Often these countries experience ongoing violence as the residue of past severe conflict. http://web.worldbank.org/wbsite/external/projects/strategies/extlicus/o.,contentmdk:22230573~pagepk:64171531~menupk:4448982~pipk:64171507~theSitepk:511778,00.html (accessed 8/8/12)

<sup>xiii</sup> Kharas, H. et al. Horizon 2015: creative destruction in the aid industry. ODI, London, 2012

<sup>xiv</sup> Melamed, C. Inequality: why it matters and what can be done. ActionAid, London, 2011. p.14

<sup>xv</sup> http://liberalconspiracy.org/2012/07/11/a-wasted-opportunity-why-is-the-fpsummit-ignoring-abortion/ (accessed on 8/8/12)

<sup>xvi</sup> EURODAD. Leveraging private sector finance: how does it work and what are the risks? Brussels 2012

<sup>xvii</sup> ActionAid. Accounting for poverty: How international tax rules keep people poor (2009), p.5

<sup>xviii</sup> ActionAid. Calling time: Why SABMiller should stop dodging taxes in Africa (2010), p.8

<sup>xix</sup> ActionAid. Accounting for poverty: How international tax rules keep people poor (2009), p.45

<sup>xx</sup> Turquet, L. Hit or miss: women’s rights and the Millennium Development Goals. ActionAid, London, 2008. p.24

<sup>xxi</sup> GADN. Violence against women: your questions answered. www.gadnetwork.org.uk/vawg-your-questions-our-answer/ (accessed 10/8/12)

<sup>xxii</sup> ActionAid. Afghan women’s rights on the brink: Why the international community must act to end violence against women in Afghanistan. London, 2012

**ActionAid**

33-39 Bowling Green Lane  
London  
EC1R 0BJ

[www.actionaid.org.uk](http://www.actionaid.org.uk)

**ActionAid International**

Private Bag X31,  
Saxonwold 2132,  
Johannesburg  
South Africa

[www.actionaid.org](http://www.actionaid.org)