Getting to a post-2015 framework
What are the scenarios?

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Introduction

The MDGs emerged at a time of relative stability, prosperity and coherence. Western economies were on the rise, the G7 was a dominant force in international diplomacy, and consensus on development issues had been building throughout the 1990s. The conditions were relatively good for forging agreement on global targets for development.

Today, in contrast, the financial crisis has rocked faith in long-established economic thinking, international power has become more diffuse and multi-polar, and climate change promises difficult times ahead. This is a much more challenging, complex and unpredictable context in which to negotiate an international framework after 2015.

In such circumstances, what can we expect?

This short briefing paper maps out five scenarios for a post-2015 framework. The scenarios describe different possibilities for how a framework could emerge, together with some brief analysis of the risks and opportunities involved.

The scenarios are deliberately ‘neater’ than what we might expect in real life. They are not predictions or either-or options. They are models of possibilities, which may – in the end – occur in some form simultaneously. Undoubtedly, the reality of post-2015 policymaking will not only be messy but full of its own surprises.

It is hoped that the scenarios will help in strategy and forward-planning for the Beyond 2015 campaign, and for others pursuing post-2015 work.

1 A draft version of these scenarios was presented at the APPG Aid Trade and Debt parliamentary seminar (13th July 2011), and the ODI event, ‘Politics of 2015’ (15th July 2011). This paper was enriched in conversation with Paul Ladd (UNDP), Claire Melamed (ODI), Paul Wafer (DFID), Leo Williams (Beyond 2015), Olivier Consolo (Concord), Mukesh Kapila (IFRC) and participants at these events. All errors and omissions are the responsibility of the author. Artwork is by Paul Newsom.
2 For further explanation of the contextual differences between MDG and post-2015 planning, see the full version of the CAFOD/IDS report, 100 Voices (www.cafod.org.uk/100voices). Another useful source is “The Politics of the MDGs: Negotiating the next generation in more complex times” by Kel Currah, What World Strategies for World Vision International (December 2010).
3 www.beyond2015.org
Scenario 1: A clearly led, legitimate framework

**In this scenario, the UN lead an inclusive, participatory and legitimate process to ratify an official framework for beyond 2015.**

In September 2011, the UN Secretary General’s Report on the MDGs sets out the intention for the UN to lead the post-2015 process, with guidance on the consultative process and timetable.

The Rio +20 Earth Summit (June 2012) is a key staging post, where the UN formally launch a major inclusive and participatory process for beyond 2015.

The MDG Summit in 2013 is attended by world leaders, who set out key milestones in the process and commit to global cooperation for a new framework. 2014 sees a series of options for the framework developed and negotiated through a transparent process with all major stakeholders represented.

In 2015, as the MDG timeline comes to a close, a new framework for beyond 2015 is ratified by the United Nations General Assembly.

**Analysis**

This scenario is the ‘ideal’, from the perspective of those who believe that the process of developing a post-2015 framework is important and who want to maximise its legitimacy, ownership and buy-in. It is a marked contrast from the process through which the MDGs emerged, and would tackle a number of the criticisms that were levelled at these goals. Some have suggested, however, that ratification through the UN General Assembly risks ending up with a lowest common denominator framework – and that the original MDG framework (with all its shortcomings) would not have survived a 192 country process.

**If we pursue the ideal process, will the legitimacy of a post-2015 framework come at the price of ambition?**
Scenario 2: A framework from the inside → out

In this scenario, expert insiders draw up a framework on the back of broad, inspirational vision, and gradually build it into formal structures.

The commitment to global cooperation on development after 2015 is reinforced at the penultimate MDG Summit in 2013, and this prompts serious inter-governmental discussion on what key priorities should be going forward.

In 2015 itself, world leaders back a broad, inspirational vision for development in the years to come – although this is not pinned down to a new framework itself.

Expert insiders from within the UN then distil a new set of goals from this vision – borrowing ideas from a range of sources (including progressive governments, civil society, academics, the private sector and policy entrepreneurs).

These new goals are gradually incorporated into formal structures, and adopted as an official post-MDG framework, which is then communicated to the general public worldwide.

Analysis

In this scenario, the authority of world leaders is in tension with the power of experts. Like the original MDGs (which were designed in exactly this way⁴), the framework could be seen as lacking in legitimacy. It could be seen as a framework smuggled in ’by the back door’ – which is able to secure a more ambitious set of goals precisely because it avoids bringing contentious and technical issues into political arena composed of 192 countries.

At what level of detail should world leaders be responsible for developing a new framework? How should the power of experts be held to account?

⁴ The Millennium Declaration (2000) set out the vision, which was then elaborated by UN experts into the Millennium Development Goals.
Scenario 3: A framework from the outside → in

In this scenario, a coalition of outsiders (CSOs, academics, policy entrepreneurs etc) agree a framework then gradually persuade governments to adopt it.

During the years from 2011 to 2015, the high-level focus of the UN remains the original Millennium Goals. With no clear UN led process for post-2015, a range of actors from civil society, academics, policy entrepreneurs, the private sector and others develop their own proposals for a post-2015 framework.

Whilst these proposals are initially in competition with each other, by the end of 2013 there is a collective agreement to advocate for one particular framework to replace the MDGs.

In 2014 a global campaign is mounted, generating pressure from the worldwide public for governments to adopt the new framework.

The campaign succeeds in getting the more progressive governments to sign up in 2015, and over a 5-10 year period they gradually persuade others to join. Once a critical mass has been achieved, the framework is adopted as the official replacement to the MDGs.

Analysis

There will be an ‘outside-in’ movement regardless of how the official post-2015 process is organised – as civil society (and the development community at large) seize 2015 as a major policy window. In the scenario framed above, the great challenge will be getting to a collective agreement on one particular framework that a global campaign should be focused on; and getting this agreement in time for a campaign to mobilise and hit the 2015 opportunity. Getting governments to sign up to a new framework one-by-one also represents an enormous challenge. A framework would need a much longer time-scale than 15 years in order to account for the time required to get governments on board.

Would an official ‘outside in’ process be possible? If the UN decides not to take the lead on post-2015, should they give a formal mandate to civil society to take on the planning process?
Scenario 4: A jigsaw framework

In this scenario, pieces of a new framework are brokered one-by-one through the G20, G77, UNFCCC and other international policy processes. They are then slotted together to form a new framework.

The UN do not lead strongly enough on a post-2015 framework, and new actors and other institutional structures step in to fill the void.

Between 2011 and 2015, at major international conferences, summits and assemblies – and in a variety of other ‘informal’ arenas – a series of individual goals and targets are brokered on various different issues. New actors (and others) mobilise coalitions on an inter-governmental level to break deadlocks and champion their key priorities. Regional groupings, the BRICS and other allies agree their own sets of goals.

As 2015 approaches, these coalitions work to ‘piece together’ individual goals and targets, eventually forming something like a coherent framework. Being composed of previous intergovernmental agreements, the framework has momentum behind it. This helps persuade world leaders to adopt the framework as the replacement to the MDGs.

Analysis

Real politik plays a key role in this scenario, and from a civil society perspective there is a risk of deals being made behind closed doors, of a proliferation of advocacy targets (which are impossible to keep track of), and momentum growing behind parts of a new framework before there is a chance to input from outside. Brokering a new framework ‘piece-by-piece’ may appear more manageable than designing one in its entirety – but the challenge of integrating these components into a coherent framework should not to be underestimated.

Agreeing pieces of a framework is one thing, but in whose interests will it be to slot these all together? And if the ‘real action’ is in other forum, where does this leave the UN?
Scenario 5: Failure

In this scenario, the international community fails to agree on a post-2015 framework. The MDGs are a one-off initiative, with no successor.

Despite all attempts to negotiate a post-2015 framework, it is not possible to reach international agreement. There are simply too many different interests and entrenched positions to reconcile. Many of the MDG targets are missed, and this prompts questions over the value of a new international agreement. The MDG targets are simply ‘rolled over’, with the timelines pushed back.

Failure on a post-2015 framework comes in a context of faltering international diplomacy on a wider scale. The Doha process dies, climate negotiations struggle, and the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness remains unimplemented. There are low levels of confidence in the power of international agreements to galvanise action and make lasting change in the real world.

Formal international processes become relatively low key and are no longer regarded as pivotal advocacy moments. Development issues are incorporated into international processes here and there, but there is no coherent framework tying them together.

International cooperation becomes more informal and the UN loses power. Bilateral partnerships and flexible, opportunistic coalitions emerge as the key modality for international cooperation.

Analysis

This bleak scenario is a very real danger, and something that needs to be seriously borne in mind by those engaged in post-2015 thinking. The MDGs have become an iconic element of international development architecture. If a 2015 process fails, there may well be a crisis moment for international cooperation in general – and for the UN in particular.

Is the successful negotiation of a post-2015 framework a make or break moment for the UN?
Conclusion

The scenarios in which a post-2015 framework is successfully negotiated can be plotted on a matrix (see below). The axes mark the extent to which the process is led by the UN, and the extent to which it is inclusive and participative or elite-driven.

The policy process to 2015 will not take the neat forms that these scenarios have described. In all likelihood some version of each of the scenarios will develop simultaneously – and these will clash, intermingle and compete with one another.

The Beyond 2015 campaign requires a resilient strategy for manoeuvring within what will be challenging and unpredictable context. It would be wise to plan strategically for each of the five scenarios, and to think through how they may combine together in real life.

Looking starkly at the scale of the challenge, there is no question that securing a post-2015 framework will require a significant global effort.

*In no sense should a successor to the MDGs be assumed.*