What if? Mapping scenarios to the end of 2015

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Introduction

The process to define the new development agenda has built in intensity over the last few years. As we approach the final phase of negotiations to reach agreement on a global development framework, there is much at stake. This paper assesses the broader landscape which may affect the possibility of ambitious agreement in September 2015 by mapping out four possible scenarios for the remaining months of 2015. Understanding that the post-2015 process does not stand or fall alone, this paper considers the interaction with other UN-led processes culminating this year, including the Sendai conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, Financing for Development in Addis in July (FFD), and the climate change summit in Paris in December (UNFCCC).

Overview of the UN roadmap for 2015

These scenarios will not unfold as neatly in real life as they do on paper: what is outlined here are not predictions or “either/or” options but possible pathways to stimulate discussion and highlight risks and opportunities. These scenarios were originally formulated to stimulate thinking within the global civil society campaign Beyond 2015 but it is hoped that it may be useful for other actors, both civil society and beyond, also engaged in the formation of the post-2015 agenda.¹

The four scenarios imagine pathways from January through to December 2015:

1. ‘The Train Wreck’ – in this scenario, no goals are agreed, meaning there is nothing to implement. This represents failure for the UN system and has profoundly negative results for UN-led multilateralism. While this scenario is plausible, it is unlikely due to the amount of political capital invested in the post-2015 process by member states and the UN. However, COP15 in 2009 shows that political investment does not necessarily result in agreement.

¹ A draft version of this paper was produced for the Beyond 2015 global Executive Committee meeting on 28th March in Tunisia and was enriched by input from with many people participating in the campaign. All errors and omissions are the responsibility of the author. Please send comments and feedback to nfrecheville@cafod.org.uk Illustrations by Dee McConville at sketchpadstudio.com
2. ‘The Paper Agreement’ – this situation sees a potentially ‘transformative’ package of goals agreed but lacks strong ownership, with weak implementation and accountability mechanisms resulting in little impact. This scenario is probable but undesirable as it delivers no real change.

3. ‘Business As Usual’ – in this scenario, a mediocre set of goals and targets are agreed, representing an ‘MDG+’ agenda, with mixed implementation and accountability mechanisms. Some member states take up the challenge but overall progress is patchy. This scenario is also highly probable, based on analysis of current trends.

4. ‘A Transformative Agenda’ – in the ideal scenario, ambitious goals are underpinned by strong implementation and accountability mechanisms. While this is by far the most preferable option, it will be the most challenging to achieve.

Context
There are many challenges to agreement of an ambitious post-2015 sustainable development agenda. The MDGs were created at the end of a sustained global economic boom that spanned much of the 1990s; with hindsight, a boon for multilateralism. It was also an era in which power was consolidated in a small number of countries, which enabled an agenda to be created largely behind closed doors. The MDGs focused mainly on poverty eradication in low-income countries, with few tangible responsibilities for high-income countries to address their contribution towards inequality, environmental degradation and economic disempowerment. However, after the crises in 2008 global power has become much more diffuse. A much wider range of Member States at the UN, particularly emerging economies, are flexing their multilateral muscles to actively shape the agenda. Furthermore, civil society, academia and the private sector among others are actively participating in creating the new agenda. Partly as a result of a more inclusive process, Issues such as governance that were present in the Millennium Declaration but dropped out of the MDGs have been reinserted, as well as ‘new’ challenges like energy and climate change. A broader set of issues makes negotiations – and agreement – more complex. This paper works from the assumption that the SDGs represent a step forwards. While the new agenda is broader, the MDGs have shown that without an integrated agenda, it is difficult to make progress.

The post-2015 development agenda shifts the donor/recipient mind set towards shared responsibilities. Early research with 106 CAFOD partners\(^2\) revealed that while a global development framework was important to them, it needed to better reflect national contexts, address the environment and climate change, and be created through an open, inclusive and participatory process, including people experiencing poverty and marginalisation. While this may not have resulted in an agenda that is easily “tweetable”, it provides an opportunity for a fundamental shift in how development is done over the next 15 years.

Beyond challenges within the post-2015 agenda itself, there are wider obstacles to agreement. The post-2015 agenda represents the one pillar of the UN’s work; the multiple priorities in the other two pillars (peace and security and human rights) mean a wider difficulty in getting political buy-in and space on the agenda for development issues. Civil society has a responsibility to make this a priority in 2015 so that domestic leaders are willing to give it attention and political capital.

\(^2\) See ‘100 Voices: Southern perspectives on what should come after the MDGs’ CAFOD 2011
Four scenarios

1. ‘The Train Wreck’ – No goals, no implementation
The Sendai conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in March 2015 fails to address key contentious issues. Differences in positions between countries and blocs indicate that they are far from agreement. Due to lack of pressure to reach agreement because it is not a Summit, no outcomes are agreed. This means all contentious issues and trade-offs are left for the post-2015 intergovernmental negotiations (IGNs), with the final IGNs in June and July becoming critical.

There is no strong outcome from the FfD process in Addis in July. Developed countries, who were not keen on an FfD follow-up and only agreed to a Summit scheduled late in the game, continue to exhibit a lack of political will. Most send development ministers instead of finance ministers and ignore systemic issues around aid, trade, tax, the private sector, technology transfer, and climate finance. Despite re-commitments to existing ODA, there is little new on the table, particularly for middle-income countries. The G77 leave Addis feeling angry and disappointed, unwilling to agree an ambitious post-2015 agenda without support for implementation.

Countries who want fewer goals push for the SDGs to be reopened, meaning the entire package unravels. Process fatigue means there is no time to reach agreement before the Summit. Overall, this leads to a very weak outcome (perhaps a Chair’s Statement) and no goals. The negotiations on substance is pushed further down the road but momentum is lost. Failure to reach agreement on the post-2015 agenda reduces faith in the ability of intergovernmental negotiations to deliver, with negative consequences for the Paris COP21. At the end of 2015, multilateralism is seen overall as weak, and fragmented, disjointed priorities emerge.

2. ‘Paper Agreement’ – Strong goals, weak implementation
Similar to the first scenario, the Sendai conference on DRR fails to address contentious issues. Differences between countries and negotiating blocs indicate that they are not close to agreement. All contentious issues and trade-offs are left for the post-2015 intergovernmental negotiations (IGNs), with the final IGNs in June and July becoming critical.

Subsequently, there is no strong outcome from the FfD process in Addis in July. Developed countries lack political will and avoid tackling key issues. The G77 leave Addis feeling angry and disappointed. Levels of trust further deteriorate.

To protect SDG17 and MOI targets in post-2015, the G77 refuse to consider any further discussion on SDG content and push for the SDGs to be agreed by vote rather than consensus. This reduces ownership and buy-in for implementation, with many northern countries feeling that they have been coerced into an agreement that does not reflect a good deal. Indicators are insufficiently developed to incentivise real progress. Many countries (both north and south) push back against strong accountability mechanisms, as lack of support means they are not willing to commit to changing domestic priorities and policies or to be “named and shamed”. Lack of strong agreement and an inability to settle the contentious issues delivers little positive momentum to the UNFCCC process.
3. ‘Business As Usual’ – Mediocre goals, mixed implementation
Member states reach agreement in Sendai, addressing some but not all contentious issues. The feeling that the first multilateral process of 2015 has delivered gives positive momentum to negotiators and the UN system.

The outcome from Addis is mixed; an agreement is reached with commitment to some follow-up actions but avoid critical issues. Member states deliver across FfD, post-2015, UNFCCC but ambition for transformative change and challenging commitments is weak. The outcome is sold as a success by the UN (with Amina Mohammed positioned to become next UN SG) and a number of governments. Some countries demonstrate ownership, establishing national reporting mechanisms that include civil society and a willingness to participate in the global and regional peer review from 2016. But many lack interest, meaning mixed results and patchy implementation. Although the SDGs are “universal” many countries prioritise, focusing on ‘low hanging fruit’ replicating the unbalanced progress of the MDGs. Weak indicators fail to drive progress, particularly on complex issues.

Accountability mechanisms are weak and funding structures are unclear. While some goals have multi-stakeholder initiatives set up immediately, others lose momentum. The private sector has an increased role in financing and delivery but this is not accompanied by increased transparency and accountability. Inability to settle the contentious issues delivers little positive momentum to the UNFCCC process.

4. ‘A Transformative Agenda’ – Ambitious goals, strong implementation and accountability
Member states reach agreement in Sendai, addressing contentious issues such as CBDR. This maps out a pathway for agreement within the post-2015 process; trust and confidence is built in the ability for member states at the UN to deliver across all three processes.

Member states deliver strong commitments in Addis, closing tax loopholes and agreeing to robust accountability mechanisms for private finance, on top of ODA recommitments. Funding is also allocated to support better data collection and management as part of the data revolution. The Addis outcome means that the G77 are happy for some MOI targets to be taken out of the post-2015 framework, satisfying member states who want a more streamlined agenda, while preserving ambition.

The post-2015 framework is agreed with 17 goals and around 100 targets, supported by strong accountability mechanisms. A number of high profile countries (Germany, Colombia, Brazil, South Africa) volunteer to go first for the review process beginning in 2016. These model transparent, participatory processes at the national level including people living in poverty as well as civil society actors. Multi-stakeholder initiatives spring up immediately for all goal areas, with extra ones focusing on some targets. Universality is delivered through a set of global indicators, supported by nationally and regionally determined indicators. Systemic issues are meaningfully addressed, including inequality, economic justice and participation, and clear commitments are made. The positive momentum carries through to the UNFCCC and a meaningful global climate deal is agreed in December.
The current state of play
Assessing the current state of play, most people believe we are on track for a ‘Paper Agreement’ or ‘Business as Usual’. Most people thought that it was unlikely that there would be a complete failure across all three UN processes, ruling out the ‘Train Wreck’. Similarly, many thought that it was highly unlikely that we would achieve a ‘Transformative Agenda’ – the entrenched politics of different blocs at the UN and overall lack of global leadership point towards an unwillingness to be the first to break ranks to raise the level of ambition. Having said that, some identified potential ‘wildcards’ that could dramatically change the state of play within a short timeframe.

Analysis of the Sendai outcome places us most closely to the ‘Business as usual’ scenario. While an agreement was reached, contentious issues around ‘conflict’ in the text, CBDR, international finance and technology transfer were not resolved, and references to the post-2015 agreement were removed from the final text. Surprisingly, the DDR discussions also became highly political, with senior negotiators drawing up lines for future battlegrounds, signalling a difficult couple of months ahead.

Opinions on whether we are headed towards a set of goals that are strong on paper but weak on implementation (‘Paper Agreement’), or mediocre goals that will lead only to ‘Business as Usual’ depend on how one views the proposed SDGs. For some, who see their issue reflected in the new sustainable development agenda where it was ignored by the MDGs, this is a significant step forwards. For others, who are concerned about a limited number of goals, what’s on the table represents ‘Business as Usual’ or worse.

A number of governments have been taking steps to ensure that the new agenda has impact beyond its paper trail. Among others, Colombia has already taken steps to integrate some 90 of the SDG targets into its national development plan; Uganda is the advanced stages of aligning its national plans and budgets with the SDGs; and Finland has established a National Post 2015 Coordination Committee, including various ministries, NGOs, labour unions and business.
Challenges – and potential civil society responses

Outlined below are some of the barriers to agreement and implementation of a meaningful post-2015 agenda. Since the Open Working Group generated momentum through their discussions at UNHQ, much of the conversation has focused on New York. Now may be the time for civil society to start to refocus.

1. Disconnect within governments between mission and capital
For a long time, the disconnect between missions and capitals has been evident. This has not had a simple positive or negative impact overall; while some missions are more ambitious than their government equivalents in capital, in other contexts missions focus overly on politics within the UN bubble to the detriment of the post-2015 process. After the agreement has been signed in September, this disconnect will be problematic as governments in capital will need to feel ownership in order to implement this agenda. In response to this, Beyond 2015 has been employing a ‘pincer strategy’ of collaborative advocacy where national-level civil society engage with government in capital with advocacy messages and policy priorities that are replicated in New York.

2. Disconnect between ministries and departments within government
Many national actors have highlighted the disconnection between different ministries and departments within governments as another barrier to effective implementation. Often the ministry for foreign affairs, or equivalent, holds the brief for the post-2015 negotiations. However, wider engagement is needed across ministries of finance, planning, health, education, trade and more. This obstacle is not only in developing countries but also equally applicable to developed countries. All countries will be expected to monitor and report on progress (or lack of it) as part of this universal agenda. This disconnect presents a serious challenge to meaningful implementation, and domestic and international civil society need to start collaborating to engage different ministries effectively.

3. Prioritisation and unequal traction across different goal areas
A concerted effort will be needed to ensure that governments do not simply pick the low-hanging fruit of targets that are easy to (measure and) meet. Civil society will need to play an active role in ensuring that even progress is made across all goal and target areas. But it is a misconception to assume that all governments prioritised all 8 of the MDGs. For example, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) lists taking action to achieve the Millennium Development Goals as its number one responsibility but has often prioritised education and health from the MDG stable. Other UK priorities better reflect the SDGs. Likewise, Zimbabwe selectively prioritised the MDGs, focusing on MDG 1 (poverty eradication), MDG 3 (gender equality) and MDG 6 (combatting HIV/AIDS). One response is for civil society to push for an inclusive national process when priorities are set to ensure that politicians are not simply taking easy choices to tick international boxes. People experiencing poverty and marginalisation must be included in these processes to safeguard against policies and priorities that don’t work for those who need it most.

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3 https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-international-development/about, accessed 08/04/2015
Potential wildcards
While it is difficult to foresee how 2015 will unfold, some have speculated some external factors that may influence the agreements that are reached by member states at the UN this year. While these are unpredictable in themselves, it is difficult to know exactly they will translate into the UN context.

Pope Francis
Pope Francis has both popular appeal and political sway, with a track record that covers not only a traditionally Catholic remit but also influences mainstream politics, such as the US/Cuba breakthrough. With a papal encyclical expected in June and an address to the UN General Assembly in September, some are speculating that the Pope has the potential to shift entrenched politics.

Natural disasters/climate impacts
Typhoon Maysak hit the Philippines in early April 2015, following on from the devastation of Super Typhoon Yolanda in November 2013. The increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events highlights the intense climate vulnerability that some countries are now experiencing. As the effects of climate change become increasingly apparent, an event with sufficient global attention could open the doorway to more ambitious agreements where previously there has been reluctance to co-operate.

Feet on the street
A number of campaigns and movements, such as Action/2015 and Live Earth 2015, are seeking to mobilise people in 2015. If enough people are actively campaigning, could it persuade decision-makers to take international processes seriously and up their level of ambition?

Conclusion
As negotiations advance throughout the year, it is difficult to predict how the politics might unfold across the FfD, post-2015 and UNFCCC processes. Yet clearly it is in our interest to have ambitious and legitimate agreements that can set us on the right pathway for coming years, living equitably and inclusively within planetary boundaries. The four scenarios offer a perspective on this year’s packed agenda at the UN and encourage collective thinking about the need for coordinated high-level lobbying, national advocacy and popular mobilisation to ensure the best from 2015. These need to be supplemented by detailed conversations on implementation and accountability so that any agreement at the UN translates into meaningful action from 2016 onwards.