



development dialogue paper  
no.5 | january 2014

Post-2015  
perspectives

## Open Leadership

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Jan Vandemoortele argues in *development dialogue paper no.2 'Post-2015 – why another approach is needed'* that it is time for the UN to cut back on dialogue and focus the post-2015 consultations more directly towards a development agenda that is easy to communicate, implement and monitor.

In this paper Jose Dallo advocates that continuous and inclusive dialogue can make the concept of the UN as a 'dynamic instrument for an organised world community' a reality. – Open dialogue, particularly at the national level, should continue until the end of 2015 and beyond.

Connecting citizens to the global policy processes and making sure global agreements are based on their national and personal realities provides the UN with an opportunity to strengthen its legitimacy. This opportunity for inclusiveness has been at the core of many of the activities in the post-2015 process. Continuing a dialogue gives the UN secretariat the possibility to harness the UN's convening power and get all champions, existing and potential, behind the new development priorities.

In *Development Dialogue paper no. 2* 'Post-2015 – why another approach is needed', Jan Vandermoortele advocates that we need to move beyond the consultations at this point in the post-2015 agenda creation process. He argues that the current focus on potential post-2015 development targets has 'put the cart before the horse' and calls for stronger leadership and decisiveness from the UN Secretariat. He warns that a continued absence of strong UN leadership will result in an overloaded agenda that is difficult to communicate, implement and monitor.

The UN has shown leadership, both in terms of technical inputs and opening up the process. But in contrast to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), governments want to be in the driving seat in defining the post-2015 agenda and its final set of goals. The world is different this time, as is the role of the UN system and the peoples around the world, who are able to actively engage in discussions that affect their future. Member states have asked for the UN's support and inputs, but the UN needs to be careful to avoid being seen as pre-empting the intergovernmental negotiations. However, it is in a good position to continue facilitating an evidence-based and open dialogue, which could help in achieving a comprehensive, widely owned and practical post-2015 development agenda.

The outcome document of the 'Special event to follow up efforts made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals' last September in New York showed that agreement on post-2015 is not increasingly daunting, as Mr Vandermoortele indicates, but possible and within reach.

## Still a long road ahead

I would agree with Mr Vandermoortele that conditions for multilateral initiatives are considerably less favourable today than in the year 2000. However, as the recent climate change talks in Warsaw reveal, countries have accepted the reality of the effects of a more interconnected world. They might still seem unwilling to take concrete actions in reducing the adverse impacts that a deeper interdependence generates, but it is widely acknowledged that globalisation and the emergence of complex policy changes have made development challenges cut across geographical jurisdictions.

Nevertheless, we have a starting point: the MDGs and the unfinished business associated with them, which will eventually be inherited by the post-2015 agenda. Mr Vandermoortele argues that by couching the debate in terms of the Millennium Declaration we adhere to an old script from the 1990s. Yet the Millennium Declaration (and the MDGs, which are founded on it) provides an excellent starting point for initiating the discussion: common ground that covers

most of the development challenges we face today and will continue to face, almost certainly, over the next 20 years.

The definition of the post-2015 agenda is moving from consultations to consensus-building in the framework of intergovernmental processes. Critical intergovernmental processes within the UN may be ongoing or, as for example in the case of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing, just beginning. Other processes, such as the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States planned for 2014 and the ongoing discussion under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, will also impact on the intergovernmental discussions and will shape and influence the position of member states.

Of particular importance will be the report of the Open Working Group, expected to meet in September 2014. The report will contain a proposal for sustainable development goals for 'consideration and appropriate action', but most probably will not provide the final selection of goals and targets for the post-2015 agenda. As traditionally happens in UN negotiations, it is likely that nothing will be decided until everything is decided. After the publication of the report, member states will have an additional year to discuss and negotiate a final set of goals.

As a result of the debates that took place during the 68th UN General Assembly session, we received guidance on a number of elements of the new framework. The outcome document from the 'Special Event on MDGs and Post-2015 agenda' provided us with a roadmap and indications for what is to come. It represents a positive and important step forward, one where member states are committed to working towards a single and universal agenda that targets poverty eradication and sustainable development. It tables a number of issues as principles for the future agenda, including peace and security, and governance. Finally, it requests the UN system's strong support throughout all the work of defining the new development agenda and asks the UN Secretary-General to do a synthesis of all the inputs and ideas available and publish this as a single report before the end of 2014.

## Participation, dialogue and ownership

Mr Vandermoortele indicates that more consultations will not yield an outcome that is fit for purpose, although he admits that the focus on participation has captured the attention of member states and other stakeholders, although predominantly from the North. Not so... The UNDG-facilitated consultations in the South have been mirrored by developed countries,

and the thematic, regional and global consultations organised have seen the active participation of stakeholders and member states from all regions and country typologies.

Dialogue has added momentum and has increased ownership in a difficult international context, helping bridge the gap between evidence and politics, and achieve convergence and strong common principles for a collective agenda.

We have learnt from the MDGs that ownership is a necessary condition in creating effective goals that can rally support from the various actors in a country. Acceptance of them by both governments and non-state actors entailed a lengthy process. The consultations supported by the UN are helping governments build legitimate national positions on the post-2015 agenda by researching the priorities of their populations. This exercise facilitates their early active engagement in the agenda, increasing the probability of an ambitious and successful intergovernmental agreement.

The UN-facilitated consultations have not been aimed at identifying specific goals, but at asking people what kind of world they want to live in. As Mr Vandemoortele points out in his article, dialoguing strictly about goals cannot provide us with the big picture, as it does not provide a clear vision of the way forward for the international development community. The dialogue should not only be about targets, but should include other key issues, such as accountability systems and the partnerships necessary for implementation.

Contrary to Mr Vandemoortele's opinion, a disciplined and empirical debate is possible, as the UNDG-led thematic consultations have demonstrated. They have brought all stakeholders together around issues captured by the MDGs and beyond, without falling into the temptation of defining goals.

Participation does not necessarily bring confusion and produce irreconcilable ideas. The results of the UNDG-sponsored consultations summarised in '[A Million Voices: The World We Want](#)' clearly show that people around the world agree on what is relevant for the future. Across regions and country typologies, they have been sending common messages and expressing similar priorities. This will be a crucial input for the post-2015 agenda's narrative:

- » People see the themes addressed by the MDGs, such as health, education and water, as still relevant to their lives.
- » They think the MDGs are fundamental but incomplete.
- » They call for a universal agenda.

- » They call for a higher quality of services, for inequalities and vulnerabilities to be addressed, and for better interconnection between different sectors and issues.
- » They have an appetite for participating in, deciding, and implementing their own future – they want to stay engaged with the agenda as it is fulfilled.

Open dialogue, particularly at the national level, should continue until the end of 2015 and beyond. Continuing the conversation should help countries refine their national position, inform the negotiations by means of evidence, and help start a process of thinking about the challenges that a more comprehensive agenda will undoubtedly face. A continuous and inclusive dialogue can make the concept of the UN as a 'dynamic instrument for an organised world community' a reality.

## A time for 'open' leadership

Mr Vandemoortele asks for leadership of the UN Secretariat in the post-2015 agenda and questions whether member states will accept it. We need to acknowledge that a top-down technocratic solution will not work. Discussions on the post-2015 framework encompass both technical and political components, with a central emphasis placed on member states and intergovernmental discussions. Effective leadership on a number of different fronts, not only the UN Secretariat, will be needed if we are to reach a common vision.

There is a consensus that the post-2015 agenda represents an opportunity for a paradigm shift. It should galvanise efforts, build synergies and bring new accountability mechanisms into the process. It is correct that no such revolution can happen without leadership, which is an essential ingredient of an aspirational process where a vision is agreed. Agreement to a universal agenda will require a new era of collaboration under an 'open' leadership. To make the post-2015 agenda a reality, we need an open leadership grounded in the ideas, aspirations and commitment of all peoples. Engaging 'the peoples of the United Nations', as the UN Charter says, is not an option but an obligation. It is necessary for an agenda aimed at seeking active engagement for a better world and a more sustainable planet. Connecting citizens to the global policy processes and making sure global agreements are based on their national and personal realities provides the UN with an opportunity to strengthen its legitimacy. This opportunity for inclusiveness has been at the core of many of the activities done around the post-2015 process: from the UN consultations to the work of the High Level Panel and the sessions of the Open Working Group.

We need a new deal with multiple leads and networks across national and subnational borders, constituencies and actors. Civil society and the private sector are stakeholders in national development policies and cross-border cooperation in their own right. This is why the consultations and the participatory approach being implemented by the UN system are so important, since they are multi-stakeholder.

Admittedly, agreeing on new universal goals will not be an easy process. It is unlikely that a guiding coalition will emerge 'naturally'. Dialogue and broadening the engagement with all actors should contribute to preparing a group of policy makers for the catalytic role that the Utstein Group played in delivering the MDGs. The existing and proposed dialogues can help align these groups' interests in the way they did for the MDGs. Discussion helps the leaders to listen, learn, and create a plan of action, as the attitude of some key decision makers will depend on the expectations and actions they observe in their constituencies. We need to keep the momentum and increase awareness among all stakeholders of the critical opportunity that the post-2015 agenda represents for all.

## Conclusion

We live in a different world from that of 2000. There will be fundamental differences between the MDGs and the way the post-2015 agenda is designed and implemented. An inclusive and open dialogue can deliver a consensus about the new development narrative and universal goals, while at the same time successfully mobilising all actors and helping identify leaders for the difficult task of eradicating poverty and ensuring a sustainable future for all generations.

The UN Secretariat has a huge task ahead if it is to put sustainable development and development challenges, such as inequalities and vulnerabilities, at the heart of the new agenda. In leading this effort, it has to be able to harness the UN's convening power and get all champions, existing and potential, behind these priorities.

The UN Secretary-General has been mandated to produce a report, which could be the basis for the final negotiations of member states in which they must ultimately come to a consensus about the next development framework and the resulting goals that are to be pursued. This will be a critical opportunity for him and the UN system to inspire and table an encompassing agenda poised to address 'big picture' and structural challenges. This is of course a challenge, but also a historic opportunity.



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