

IRF2015

Independent
Research
Forum



OSISA
Open Society Initiative
for Southern Africa



WORLD
RESOURCES
INSTITUTE



iied

LEMBAGA PENELITIAN
SMERU
RESEARCH INSTITUTE



RIMISP

STOCKHOLM
ENVIRONMENT
INSTITUTE



IGES
Institute for
Global Environmental
Strategies

Development
Alternatives

Towards a Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda

An Informal Retreat
Glen Cove, New York, 2-4 October 2013

Summary

On 2-4 October 2013, the Independent Research Forum on a Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda (IRF2015)—a collaboration of leading sustainable development institutes from across the globe—hosted the first 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 aim to support the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals and the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing. The retreats will progressively look at a range of issues at the intersection of poverty eradication and sustainable development and at different levels of action from global to local.

This first retreat included participants from 32 member states, UN and World Bank representatives, and members of IRF2015. The governments of Colombia, Norway, Pakistan, South Africa and Switzerland supported the organization of the retreat.¹ The meeting was held under Chatham House Rule and addressed three inter-related topics:

- 1) The nature and purpose of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their relationship to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).
- 2) How a new global goal framework can be designed to integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions of poverty eradication and sustainable development.
- 3) How to build a shared agenda based on the complementary principles of *universality* and *differentiation* and how to ‘unpack’ these issues.

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

¹ Financial support was provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark (Danida), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

Key Messages

A notable feature of the retreat was the extent to which dialogue transcended the traditional “north-south divide” on many topics. Participants demonstrated a common commitment to achieving the MDGs, and a shared recognition of the need for a more integrated and universal post-2015 agenda that builds on the MDGs and reflects the critical interdependencies between goal areas. While significant differences remain and likely will emerge when delving into these topics more deeply, the areas of commonality suggest that there is a stronger basis for building consensus than is generally recognized.

Discussions revealed significant areas of convergence on the broad contours of a post-2015 development framework, including the need for continued focus on MDG priority areas and the need to address major new development challenges. Participants expressed strong support for keeping the MDGs as the core of a new universal agenda that would reach the most vulnerable, shift economies to inclusive and sustainable growth pathways, and be adaptable to each country’s development context. There was strong support for ‘finishing the job’ on the MDGs and ‘getting to zero’ on key human development goals such as health and education. At the same time, many participants emphasized the importance of a more transformative agenda that addresses the root causes of poverty, generates conditions to deliver well-being to an emerging global middle class, and advances in a balanced manner the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability as called for at Rio+20.

Participants recognized the challenge of devising a set of global goals that are both ‘simple’ and compelling to communicate AND respond to the growing complexity of today’s world. The MDGs helped provide focus around a small number of goals that (for the most part) were easy to understand and communicate. Participants would like to maintain this focus and simplicity while also addressing issues not sufficiently covered by the MDGs and the linkages between them. Some suggested that countries might agree to a very small number of high level goals, where progress on one goal area would also generate co-benefits in other thematic areas, and which would allow for significant tailoring to country circumstances.

A robust post-2015 development agenda goes beyond goals and targets. While the formulation of goals and targets has dominated the global discourse on the post-2015 agenda, reaching agreement on a new global development narrative, on means of implementation and a redefined global partnership for development, and the need to improve data and monitoring will be crucial to delivering real change. Participants were clear that implementation issues in particular will require new and more effective forms of collaboration among all stakeholders, including a much greater role for the private sector.

The need for inclusive and sustainable economic growth should be at the center of a new and transformational development narrative and agenda. The centrality of economic growth—and the quality of growth—came through clearly in the discussion. Participants called for a focus on inclusive, durable growth that would reduce inequalities within and between countries and contribute to lasting prosperity and well-being for all. This, in turn, requires focusing on the links between growth and the multiple dimensions of poverty, inequality and well-being such as empowerment, resource entitlements, and secure and decent livelihoods and employment.

There is strong support for an agenda that addresses new global development challenges. Participants felt that the post-2015 agenda should reflect the rapidly evolving global development context, including key drivers of and barriers to sustainable and equitable development. This will mean a greater focus on cross-cutting issues such as environmental sustainability and inequality, risk and resilience, and governance to empower individuals through access to information, participation and justice.

A more integrated goal framework is needed, but questions remain on how to put this into practice. Participants discussed the deep interlinkages between prospective goal areas. For example, the food-water-energy nexus and the connections between these goal areas and with other development concerns such as health, gender, and economic growth and employment. This poses the challenge of designing a goal framework that recognizes these interlinkages while meeting the desire for simplicity. An iterative, integrated approach to goal and target-setting will be needed—whether bottom-up from targets to goals or top-down from goals to targets—as certain targets will apply to multiple goals when interlinkages are taken into account. Further, a more integrated goal framework will call for greater integration of policymaking at national and local levels, breaking down traditional silos.

‘Universality’ is complex and can be understood in multiple ways. Discussion revealed broad agreement on the need for a future development framework to be universal in scope in order to respond to today’s global development challenges. However, it was clear that there is a lack of clarity on how to define universality and differing views on its application to a new global development agenda. Proposals for how to ‘unpack’ universality include: (i) as a form of global solidarity, whereby actions by the south are supported by the north (e.g. MDG8); (ii) as ‘zero goals’ to ensure no one is left behind anywhere; (iii) as a shared commitment to globally-relevant challenges, although policy needs may differ by national context (e.g. tackling hunger versus overconsumption); and (iv) as collective commitment to deliver on a global enabling context that supports sustainable and equitable development trajectories for all countries (e.g. action on climate change, trade and other global public goods).

A robust evidence base is needed. Participants pointed to the need for robust analysis to aid in designing an integrated, universal goal framework. Analysis can show how different goal areas are related, how progress in one area might impact another, and how more integrated approaches to policy, planning and implementation can enhance development impact and reduce trade-offs.

Looking Ahead

Participants agreed that the retreat provided a very useful forum for open and substantive discussion in support of the official intergovernmental process on SDGs and the post-2015 agenda. However, to help build common ground and momentum for an ambitious post-2015 agenda, future informal retreats will need to deepen the dialogue on potentially divisive issues. Looking ahead, issues that future retreats could focus on include: (i) defining a shared vision and narrative on poverty eradication, growth and sustainable development; (ii) further unpacking the complementary principles of ‘universality’ and ‘differentiation’ and their application to a global goal framework; (iii) examining how ‘sustainable consumption and production’ (SCP) can be applied to different country contexts; and (iv) redefining the global partnership for development and unpacking means of implementation for the post-2015 agenda.

Independent Research Forum on a Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda

IRF2015 is a collaboration of leading sustainable development institutes from across the globe that 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

SMERU Research Institute

Jakarta, Indonesia
www.smeru.or.id

Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)

Hayama, Japan
www.iges.or.jp

Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)

Stockholm, Sweden
www.sei-international.org

International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)

London, UK
www.iied.org

World Resources Institute (WRI)

Washington DC, USA
www.wri.org