

## What is Required to Meet the MDGs and What are the Key Elements of a Post-2015 Architecture?

### Key messages

- The MDGs continue to matter, but they were born in a more stable context and they need to be outfitted for a world of greater instability and uncertainty
- One way of managing uncertainty is to establish clear links to indicators relating to vulnerability of the poorest
- Work has to begin now on the legacy of the MDGs with the launch of an 'MDG plus agenda'. DFID's role here is to lead a truly global and participatory post-2015 discussion.

### The Current Context

The current global context for poverty reduction is one of global recession, uncertainty and many ongoing changes in policy and situations – in short of multiple and inter-linked crises, with potentially large adverse impacts on poverty.

What happened? Only 12–18 months ago the MDGs looked on-track globally (although way off in most of sub-Saharan Africa and parts of South Asia). Progress towards MDG 1 on income and food poverty (those living under a dollar-a-day and under-nutrition respectively) is, of course, linked to economic growth and to food prices to some considerable extent. Globally it was looking hopeful but slowing growth is now raising serious questions, in particular (slowing growth) in China and India. For the many African countries that were already off track, the picture is simply much worse. MDGs 2, 3, 4 and 5, for example, covering education, health and gender, are all highly dependent on public expenditures and

often on aid flows. Prospects were mixed pre-crisis but now the risks are of a crisis-induced squeezing of public expenditures in developing countries (as tax revenues fall) and of shrinking of aid budgets. There is also the cost of bail-outs in terms of higher taxes and lower public expenditures at some point in the future.

### What is Needed to Refocus the MDGs Amid Multiple Crises?

The MDGs have been pursued to date in a relatively stable world, reasonably predictable for planning, growth and aid. The MDGs have provided a rallying call and real instrumentality. We must now pursue them in new and uncertain times. We need to expand the MDG-lens to capture these increased vulnerabilities and insecurities that are hindering progress on poverty reduction by linking vulnerabilities to corresponding MDGs and capture the underlying enabling and disabling processes that lead to those vulnerabilities and (in)securities. Fortunately, we can build on existing

work quickly and develop better policy indicators i.e. not only reduce vulnerability outcomes but indicators to ensure underlying processes are supporting this (see table 1). In a rapidly changing world the poor in particular need voice and visibility in policy processes, either directly via participatory institutions for adaptation (i.e. voice) or in pro-poor indicators (i.e. visibility) used by policymakers. In short, the various 'crises' we face cannot be solved without those involved in them.

### What Would be the Ingredients of an MDG Plus Agenda?

There are currently a wide range of indicators initiatives. The ferment of activity suggests our current approach to development indicators needs rethinking. Indeed, the June 2007 OECD Istanbul Declaration committed governments to develop locally defined poverty and human well-being indicators.

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A 'Human Well-being' lens is emerging as a complement to the more traditional and material ways of thinking about poverty and ill-being. Human well-being extends attention from what people can do and be and adds how people feel about what they can do and be. This well-being approach expands attention from the material domain of life to include the subjective domain, the relational domain, and the interaction of the three. What a person can do and be will be a product of what they feel and think they can do and be. This implies new types of public policy emphasis that seek to influence how people think and behave.

Of course, the post-MDGs architecture is not just a question of what indicators or what targets' but also what process should we promote to produce any new set. In light of this, here are three possible scenarios:

**I.** More of the same. We carry forward the same MDGs with or without a timeline. Jeffery Sachs has argued for 2025 and others for 2020. However is just another 5-10 years enough to make progress?

**II.** Something more adventurous. We could have new or different kinds of targets perhaps locally defined with or without a timeline.

**III.** A synthesis of the MDGs plus something fresh. We could pursue a core of the same MDGs with a surrounding ring of something new that was locally defined.

We could be bolder about heralding a new development agenda which has a wider scope, but which anchors around the MDGs. We might seek to capture what Manning (2009: 65) calls a more 'one-world' approach aimed at encouraging policymakers in all countries to give greater weight to tackling systemic inter-related global issues of which poverty is one in itself, and strongly influenced by others such as climate change. This approach resonates with Douglas Alexander's speech in Washington on 12 July 2007 on 'the Role of International Development in a Changing World'. However, more work is needed on Scenarios 2 and 3 soon in order to have sufficient time for a global discussion on any post-2015 architecture.

To achieve this DFID should launch a series of dialogues on drawing on a variety of technologies and processes for multi-sector, transnational consultations. In the meantime, indicators should start to focus on the poorest quintiles in particular which are hidden in averages.

**Table 1.**  
**Mapping key human securities and vulnerabilities with enabling processes MDGs, and Corresponding Securities and Vulnerabilities**

Key human (in)securities and vulnerabilities	Examples of corresponding indicators for reduced vulnerability (including household and individual levels)	Corresponding MDGs
Economic and financial security	Indicators of economic and financial (see discussion Sumner and Wolcott 2009)	MDG 1 – Income poverty
Food and social security		MDG 1 – Nutrition poverty
Physical security	Indicators of food security (see discussion, Devereux, 2006)	MDG 2 – Education poverty
Climate change and energy security		MDG 3 – Gender equality
Stability and reform of the international system	Indicators of Social Protection	MDG 4-7 – Health and environment poverty
	Indicators of Social Quality	MDG 8 – Global partnership
	Indicators of physical safety and security (see for discussion: Diprose 2007; Justino 2009)	
	Indicators of pro-poor governance	

## Further Reading

Devereux, S. (2006) *Strengthening Emergency Needs Assessment Capacity*, Brighton, Institute of Development Studies

Justino, P. (2009, forthcoming) 'Poverty and Violent Conflict: A Micro-Level Perspective on the Causes and Duration of Warfare'. *Journal of Peace Research*, 46.3, May

Manning, R. (2009), *Using Indicators to Encourage Development: Lessons from the MDGs*, Copenhagen, Danish Institute for International Studies:

McGregor, J. A. (2007) 'Researching Wellbeing: From Concepts to Methodology'. In Gough, I. and McGregor, J. A. (eds), *Wellbeing in Developing Countries*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sumner, A. and Wolcott, J. (2009, forthcoming), *Will the Global Financial Crisis Hurt the Poor? Evidence from Previous Crises*, Brighton, Institute of Development Studies

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