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## **“THE POST-2015 *SUSTAINABLE* DEVELOPMENT AGENDA: IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION”**

Development Cooperation Policy Branch  
Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs  
United Nations

# **THE POST-2015 *SUSTAINABLE* DEVELOPMENT AGENDA: IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION**

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Switzerland High-level Symposium  
24-25 October**

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## 1. Introduction

Over two decades ago, the World Commission on Environment and Development, better known as the Brundtland Commission, defined sustainable development in its 1987 report *Our Common Future* as a process of development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (UN 1987). Promoting and supporting a transition to sustainable development was urgent when this groundbreaking report was published. Today, the need to commit to sustainable pathways of development is more urgent than ever. Over the past 20 years, considerable progress has been made on human development: the number of people living in absolute poverty has fallen from 2 billion to around 1.3 billion, sound progress has been made on child mortality and primary school enrolment, and the global middle class is growing fast due to strong economic growth in many emerging economies. Nevertheless, this period also saw greenhouse gas emissions rise by 2 to 3 per cent per year and land degradation, water scarcity, and biodiversity losses reach crisis points in many places. In addition, the global population passed the seven billion mark in 2011, with one in seven people living on less than \$2 per day, many of whom experience malnourishment. One billion people lack clean drinking water, 1.3 billion people have no access to electricity, and more than 2.2 million children under the age of 14 die because of unsanitary water (OECD 2012). The world currently faces a situation where significant human progress has been made over the past two decades, but this progress is being threatened and limited by the deterioration of the environment (Scott 2012; Melamed, Scott, and Mitchell 2012).

“Business-as-usual” scenarios project a world in 2050 where one billion people remain without access to basic services, the global population is energy-hungry and still powered by fossil fuels, and increases in greenhouse gas emissions and climate change-related warming transgress planetary boundaries, in turn increasing the long-term risk of the collapse of the Earth’s ecosystem (UN DESA 2012). The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) points out that while some countries will prosper and rapidly converge economically in the future, many will be left behind to fall deeper into poverty. Even prosperous countries will struggle to meet the needs of their citizens as environmental degradation is increasingly felt. Piecemeal efforts by countries to reduce the intensity of production and consumption will be insufficient to stave off the collapse of the Earth’s ecosystem. More investments are needed in human and physical capital, public services and environmental protection (SDSN 2013).

These trends and projections necessitate a major shift in the way economies and societies achieve human progress and development. Across the globe, a shift to low-carbon, environmentally sustainable development pathways are necessary. Those traditionally engaged in development cooperation, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) donors, developing

country governments and civil society, as well as other key stakeholders, such as the private sector, have acknowledged that a change in how economic, social and environmental considerations are integrated and balanced in development cooperation is urgently needed. This requires a shift away from the historic North-South, aid-centric paradigm dominated by a focus on poverty reduction and transfers in resources such as official development assistance (ODA) from developed to developing countries. Needed is a new sustainable development paradigm that includes a universal framework that better reflects the multi-polar, multi-stakeholder world that has emerged and is better able to address key looming challenges. Such a paradigm would continue to support poverty reduction while at the same time facilitate more environmentally sustainable processes of development, secure global public goods, and address global governance challenges that undermine the world's ability to address competing environmental and development needs.

This background study examines how the international development agenda can shift from a focus on poverty reduction to a focus on poverty eradication in the context of sustainable development and the role that development cooperation can play in this shift. Specifically, the background study explores:

- how the sustainable development and post-2015 development agendas are converging;
- the financing implications of putting sustainable development at the centre of the international development agenda; and
- the institutional implications of putting sustainable development at the centre of the international development agenda.

The background study offers neither all the answers on these issues nor detailed recommendations about the role that development cooperation should play. Rather, it seeks to provide the conceptual groundwork for informed and evidence-based discussion about the role that development cooperation, a key tool for delivering on the international development agenda, can play in the future international development agenda.

## **2. Putting sustainable development at the centre of a future international development cooperation agenda**

### **2.1 Evolution of sustainable development in the international development architecture**

Probably the defining moment for sustainable development as a concept and priority was the UN Conference on Environment and Development, widely known as the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Preceded by a number of important global conferences and processes, starting with the UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm

in 1972 and the Brundtland Commission's report that followed during the next decade, the Earth Summit translated concerns about the sustainability of the world's future into international commitments and raised expectations about the world's capacity to solve pressing global issues and build a more sustainable future.

The Earth Summit resulted in a number of international instruments that continue to provide the framework for sustainable development policies. Most notable was the groundbreaking Agenda 21, a 40-chapter program of action that includes detailed goals, responsibilities, work plans, and funding estimates to implement sustainable development at the local, national and global levels. Ambitions were high, as were the stated goals of the agenda: improving the living standards of those in need, better managing and protecting the Earth's ecosystem, and bringing about a more prosperous future for all (UN 1992a). The Earth Summit also resulted in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, a set of 27 principles that recognised the indivisibility of the fate of humankind from that of the Earth and established sustainable development in an international framework (UN 1992b).

Despite this high-level political commitment to sustainable development and the optimism that accompanied it, the 1990s and 2000s saw the separation, rather than integration, of the environmental, economic and social pillars that characterised the sustainable development agenda (Higgins and Chenard 2012). While Earth Summit+5, held in New York in 1997, and the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg in 2002, sought to keep sustainable development on the international development agenda, these conferences were more influential on environmental than international development circles (Maxwell 2011). In fact, sustainable development became synonymous with environmental sustainability, rather than the broad tri-pillared approach that had been previously conceptualised.

In parallel, the poverty reduction agenda rose in prominence. The UN General Assembly's landmark Millennium Declaration in 2000 affirmed the international community's commitments to a number of important values, including freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility (UN 2000). But it was the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which form only part of the declaration, that garnered the most attention. Indeed, the eight MDGs have collectively come to be the key organizing and monitoring framework for international development cooperation. While MDG 7 is devoted to environmental sustainability,<sup>2</sup> it is widely acknowledged that the focus

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<sup>2</sup> The targets associated with this goal include integrating the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reversing the loss of environmental resources, reducing biodiversity loss, halving the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, and achieving improvement in the lives of slum dwellers.

of the MDGs has been on reducing extreme poverty and improving education and health outcomes in developing countries. The balance among the economic, social and environmental dimensions on which sustainable development was founded is neither reflected in the framing of the MDGs nor the significant amount of policy and resource attention that has been devoted to achieving them.

## **2.2 Putting sustainable development at the centre of a future development framework**

The threat of climate change and environmental degradation to global prosperity and security has recently resulted in broad consensus that the international development community must do a better job of integrating environmental sustainability into its architecture and actions, as seen in Rio+20. This consensus sees that global development policy has come full circle, returning to the conceptualisation of sustainable development that was affirmed at the Earth Summit more than two decades ago.

Sustainable development seeks a more holistic treatment of economic, social and environmental dimensions of development. The shift in the focus of international development from poverty reduction to poverty eradication in the context of sustainable development requires a global framework that: continues to focus on reducing extreme poverty, limits the global ecological footprint through the transition to a global green economy and protection of the environment, and secures and manages global public goods.

Currently, there are two processes that have the potential to facilitate the aforementioned paradigm shift. One is the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) process, agreed at the June 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development known as Rio+20<sup>3</sup> and driven by the UN General Assembly Open Working Group (OWG) on SDGs, an intergovernmental committee. The other is the post-2015 development agenda process, which has been led by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and has to date largely centred around the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (HLP), which published its report on recommendations in May 2013 (see HLP 2013).

Leading the SDGs process, the OWG on SDGs comprises 30 representatives nominated by UN Member States from the five UN regional groupings. Currently chaired by Hungary and Kenya, the group first met in March 2013. Its program of work is organised into two phases. The first, between March 2013 and February 2014, focuses on sectoral (e.g., cities, employment) and cross-cutting (e.g., inequality) themes, with time set aside to consider

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<sup>3</sup> UN Member States agreed to establish a universal set of SDGs to create a stronger international architecture that supports sustainable development. They adopted a 10-year framework on sustainable consumption and production and acknowledged the potential for greening economies. Nearly 700 commitments, worth hundreds of billions of dollars, were publicly announced by governments, multilateral development banks, the private sector and civil society (UN 2012a).

implementation and partnerships. The second phase, from February to September 2014, will focus on preparing a report to the 68th session of the UN General Assembly (UN 2013b). In addition to the OWG, the SDSN was launched in 2012 as part of the UN Secretary-General's initiatives to promote sustainable development. Led by Jeffrey Sachs, the network is tasked with highlighting the scientific knowledge necessary to underpin the post-2015 development framework. The SDSN released its report for the UN Secretary-General titled *An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development* in June 2013, in which it outlined 10 key issues to be addressed by the post-2015 development agenda.

The HLP, co-chaired by Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and United Kingdom Prime Minister David Cameron and comprising 27 representatives from government, the private sector, civil society, and academia, was tasked by the UN Secretary-General to "prepare a bold yet practical vision ... on a global post-2015 development agenda ... around the three dimensions of economic growth, social equity and environmental sustainability" (UN 2012a). Following a number of meetings and consultations in 2012 and 2013, the panel published its report titled *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development* in May 2013. This report, as well as the work of the OWG on SDGs and the SDSN, were key inputs into *A life of dignity for all: accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015* (see UNSG 2013), the Secretary-General's report to the 68th session of the UN General Assembly, which runs from September 2013 to September 2014, and the special event on achieving the MDGs and looking beyond 2015 convened in New York in September 2013.

Alongside these two processes, the Secretary-General established the UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda in September 2011 to coordinate, in consultation with all stakeholders, UN system-wide preparations for the post-2015 agenda. The UN has undertaken its most comprehensive global consultation ever, convening 11 thematic consultations, country-level consultations in over 80 countries, and a global e-consultation to get feedback on what should come after the MDGs. A global survey for citizens called MY World is seeking to capture people's voices, priorities, and views on what the post-2015 priorities should be through online, mobile phone, and on-paper voting. Some of these views have been consolidated in a new report titled *A Million Voices: The World We Want* (see UN 2013a), which captures the findings and highlights of this extensive consultative process to date.

Although currently working on two parallel tracks, UN Member States, civil society, and UN stakeholders have consistently expressed their desire for an integrated process and, ultimately, a single set of new global development goals. Member States stated clearly in the Rio+20 outcome document that the SDGs process "needs to be coordinated and



coherent with the processes to consider the post-2015 development agenda” (UN 2012b). Both the HLP and the OWG on SDGs have called for one set of global development goals (HLP 2013; UN 2013b).

Work on the post-2015 development agenda and SDGs to date indicates that sustainable development will indeed become a central tenant of the post-2015 development framework, which may end up being described more accurately as a post-2015 *sustainable* development framework. The overarching narrative that looks set to frame the post-2015 agenda is one that has two interconnected objectives: the eradication of extreme poverty and the promotion of sustainable development (see HLP 2013 and UNSG 2013). To achieve both, the HLP proposed that five transformational shifts need to take place: 1) leave no one behind; 2) put sustainable development at the core; 3) transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth; 4) build peace and effective, open and accountable public institutions for all; and 5) forge a new global partnership (HLP 2013). For its part, the SDSN has highlighted that the global framework for sustainable development should be based on four related normative concepts, including the right to development for every country, human rights and social inclusion, convergence of living standards across countries, and shared responsibilities and opportunities (SDSN 2013).

The UN Secretary-General’s report *A Life of Dignity for All* points out that consensus is emerging across various processes on the key tenants of the post-2015 framework. It states that:

Indeed, it is possible to see the emerging outlines of a new sustainable development agenda: universal in nature yet responsive to complexities, needs and capacities of individual countries and regions; bold in ambition but simple in design; combining the economic, social and environmental dimensions while putting the highest priority on ending poverty and reducing inequality; protective of the planet, its biodiversity, water and land; rights-based, with particular emphasis on women, young people and marginalized groups; eager for new and innovative partnerships; and supported by pioneering approaches to data and rigorous accountability mechanisms. (UNSG 2013, 4)

Beyond this overarching design, much attention is being paid to the particular issues that should constitute the post-2015 goals. Table 1 illustrates the emerging similarities among the priority issues for the post-2015 framework and SDGs processes.

**Table 1. Priority issues for the post-2015 development framework and SDGs processes according to selected reports and initiatives<sup>4</sup>**

Priority Area	Report of the UN Secretary-General on the MDGs and the UN development agenda beyond 2015 <sup>5</sup> <i>Transformative and mutually reinforcing actions required to:</i>	Report of High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda <sup>6</sup> <i>Illustrative goals:</i>	Sustainable Development Solutions Network <sup>7</sup> <i>Goals proposed for discussion:</i>	MY World Survey <sup>8</sup> <i>MY World priorities to rank:</i>	UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda <sup>9</sup> <i>Issues identified in integrated post-2015 framework:</i>	Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals <sup>10</sup> <i>Issues identified as priorities in first meeting of Open Working Group:</i>
Poverty and/or Hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eradicate poverty in all its forms</li> <li>• End hunger and malnutrition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• End poverty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• End extreme poverty, including hunger</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affordable and nutritious food</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eradicating income poverty and hunger</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eradication of poverty and hunger</li> </ul>
Inclusion and Equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tackle exclusion and inequality</li> <li>• Empower women and girls</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empower girls and women and achieve gender equality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender equality, social inclusion and human rights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality between men and women</li> <li>• Support for people who cannot work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing inequalities</li> <li>• Gender equality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender equality and empowerment of women</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide quality education and lifelong learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide quality education and lifelong learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure effective learning for all children and youth for life and livelihood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A good education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality education for all</li> </ul>	
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure healthy lives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieve health and well-being at all ages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better health care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced mortality and morbidity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to and good management of the essentials of human well-being, such as food, water, health services and energy</li> </ul>
Food Security and Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• End hunger and malnutrition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure food security and good nutrition</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affordable and nutritious food</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adequate nutrition for all</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to and good management of the essentials of human well-being, such as food, water, health services and energy</li> </ul>
Water and Sanitation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieve universal access to water and sanitation</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to clean water and sanitation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universal access to clean water and sanitation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to and good management of the essentials of human well-being, such as food, water, health and energy</li> </ul>

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Higgins (2013).

<sup>5</sup> UNSG (2013).

<sup>6</sup> HLP (2013).

<sup>7</sup> SDSN (2013).

<sup>8</sup> UN (2013a).

<sup>9</sup> UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda (2012).

<sup>10</sup> IISD (2012).

Priority Area	Report of the UN Secretary-General on the MDGs and the UN development agenda beyond 2015  <i>Transformative and mutually reinforcing actions required to:</i>	Report of High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda  <i>Illustrative goals:</i>	Sustainable Development Solutions Network  <i>Goals proposed for discussion:</i>	MY World Survey  <i>MY World priorities to rank:</i>	UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda  <i>Issues identified in integrated post-2015 framework:</i>	Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals  <i>Issues identified as priorities in first meeting of Open Working Group:</i>
Climate, Environment and Planetary Boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address climate change</li> <li>Address environmental challenges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manage natural resource assets sustainably</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Curb human-induced climate change and ensure green energy for all</li> <li>Secure ecosystem services, biodiversity and good management of natural resources</li> <li>Achieve development within planetary boundaries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action on climate change</li> <li>Protecting forests, rivers and oceans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protection of biodiversity</li> <li>Stable climate</li> <li>Resilience to natural hazards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustainable consumption and production</li> </ul>
Sustainable, Inclusive Growth, Prosperity and Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote inclusive, sustainable growth and decent employment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create jobs, sustainable livelihoods and equitable growth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve agricultural systems and raise rural prosperity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Better job opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensuring decent work and productive employment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employment and decent jobs</li> </ul>
Energy and Infrastructure		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secure sustainable energy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Curb human-induced climate change and ensure green energy for all</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reliable energy at home</li> <li>Phone and internet access</li> <li>Better transport and roads</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conflict-free access to natural resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to and good management of the essentials of human well-being, such as food, water, health services and energy</li> </ul>
Governance, Human Rights and Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build peace and effective governance based on the rule of law and sound institutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure good governance and effective institutions</li> <li>Ensure stable and peaceful societies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gender equality, social inclusion and human rights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An honest and responsive government</li> <li>Protection against crime and violence</li> <li>Political freedoms</li> <li>Freedom from discrimination and persecution</li> <li>Crime and violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Freedom from violence, conflict and abuse</li> </ul>	
Demographic Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address demographic challenges</li> <li>Enhance the positive contribution of migrants</li> <li>Meet the challenges of urbanisation</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empower inclusive, productive and resilient cities</li> </ul>			
Global Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foster a renewed global partnership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a global enabling environment and catalyse long-term finance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transform governance for sustainable development</li> </ul>			

While it seems clear that many of the priority issues for the post-2015 framework process align with those for the SDGs process, it is worth noting that the shift from a poverty-focused agenda to a broader agenda that includes poverty eradication in the context of sustainable development is still hotly political. Least developed countries are concerned that shifting the focus from poverty reduction to sustainable development will result in more resources being diverted to middle-income countries. Middle-income countries feel that they might be constrained in their choice of development pathways. Both low- and middle-income countries have strongly and consistently argued that sustainability considerations should not be turned into “green conditionalities.”<sup>11</sup> Some donors are reluctant to link development cooperation, which has historically been grounded in the notion of solidarity, with sustainable development and its principle of common but differentiated responsibilities given historical circumstances. Reorienting development cooperation “beyond aid” requires that donors take policy coherence for development and domestic policy on issues such as energy much more seriously (IISD 2012).

### **3. Implications for development cooperation principles: are they still relevant?**

The post-2015 development framework will have important implications for development cooperation principles owing to its universal nature and focus on issues relating to policy coherence for development. The framework will also have implications for aid, including greater attention to greening ODA.

Historically, the international community has engaged in a range of processes for determining the goals of development cooperation and the means by which development cooperation is implemented. Apart from MDG 8, which focuses on global partnership, the MDGs do not provide a clear roadmap for how development cooperation objectives should be achieved. Other processes have sought to facilitate this – chief among these has been the international aid effectiveness agenda and, to a lesser extent, non-aid processes that relate to MDG 8 (e.g., the 2002 Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development).

The international aid effectiveness agenda, which began in the early 2000s, sponsored by the OECD-DAC, has dominated many of the international policy discussions on how to implement development cooperation. It focuses on how to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of development cooperation and support developing country ownership. The 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness articulated key principles to guide aid

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<sup>11</sup> The rejection of “green conditionalities” was one of the most consistent threads of the discussions on a green economy during the preparations for Rio+20. This is reflected in the Rio+20 outcome document, which explicitly states that such conditionalities should not be contemplated (UN 2012b, para. 58).

relationships between donors and recipients (see OECD 2005). It included commitments and implementation targets in five areas – ownership, alignment, harmonisation, mutual accountability and managing for results – that proponents argued would lead to better quality of aid and better results. Developing countries agreed to own their development priorities through the establishment of national development plans and improved country systems that donors could align their efforts with in harmonised ways. The Paris Declaration was not a universal framework, however, and the international aid effectiveness agenda that is embodied in the declaration continues to face challenges regarding its legitimacy, though it has received broader multi-stakeholder endorsement over the years, including most recently at the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in 2011.<sup>12</sup>

Alongside improved aid effectiveness, developing countries have historically argued for governance reform of the international system to better reflect their interests and achieve their development objectives. They have called for more equitable and representative systems of global governance as well as reform of the international economic architecture, particularly the international trade and international financial and monetary systems.<sup>13</sup> MDG 8, which includes commitments on trade, finance, debt, technology and knowledge transfers, and addressing the needs of least developed countries, sought to respond to some of these demands. Yet, progress on MDG 8 has on the whole been disappointing (UN 2012c; UN ECOSOC 2012b). Rather than focusing on global systemic reform, countries in the global North have preferred to work on policy coherence for development. Some countries, particularly those in the European Union, as well as the European Commission have made attempts to improve development outcomes by taking into consideration the impact of their non-aid policies. Though some countries, such as Sweden, have developed policy frameworks and legislation for improving policy coherence for development, by and large providers of development cooperation have tended to focus on improving aid effectiveness – along with governance in developing countries – as a means to achieve development results.

The architecture that defines the post-2015 development framework will differ from the MDGs and international agreements that underlay development cooperation in several ways. Most significantly, there are many proposals that the post-2015 framework be universal. The HLP report called for a new global partnership based on a common vision that allows for context-specific solutions for individual countries but is uniformly ambitious across countries (HLP 2013). Unlike previous international development

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<sup>12</sup> See Kindornay and Samy (2012) for a full review of historic support for the aid effectiveness agenda and the legitimacy challenges that it has faced.

<sup>13</sup> For more information, see UNCTAD (2008) and Africa Regional Meeting (2010).

frameworks (the MDGs, Monterrey Consensus, Paris Declaration) that are based on North-South flows, the post-2015 framework is meant to be applied to all countries in recognition of the changed international context characterised by intensifying environmental pressures, a more complex geopolitical landscape, emerging state and non-state actors and increasing flows to and between developing countries in the forms of trade, investments, and remittances that far outstrip declining aid resources. Unlike the MDGs, in which most targets apply to developing countries, the post-2015 framework is set to ask all countries – including industrialised countries – to make commitments to universally shared goals in areas such as sustainability, energy, employment, education, health and gender equality. And rather than being made up of global goals with global targets, as is the case with the MDGs, the post-2015 framework will likely be comprised of global goals with country-level targets. Some of these targets may apply to all countries in the form of global minimum standards, including “zero” goals, as the HLP recommended. But most targets would vary from country to country, taking into account different starting points and diverse needs (HLP 2013). This approach would enable a more meaningful connection between global goals and domestic priorities and make new targets more useful for national monitoring purposes.

The post-2015 development agenda will call for greater attention to be paid to policy coherence, in both developing and developed countries. As the UN Secretary-General’s High Level Panel on Global Sustainability emphasised, whole-of-government connections are critical. For example, treating climate adaptation as a wholly separate area of work from agriculture, water management or health care does not make sense – these areas are substantially interconnected and policy planning and responses need to reflect such interconnectedness. Sustainable development is too broad and complex to be dealt with by any individual ministry alone. It needs to involve everyone at the crossroads of economic, social, and environmental issues. To succeed, leadership needs to be exercised from the top by heads of state and government, cabinets and ministries such as ministries of finance and planning. Measures should also be taken to strengthen the interface between policy making and science to facilitate evidence-based political decision making on sustainable development (GSP 2012).

Policy coherence for development means ensuring coherence among key domestic policies, which necessarily involves being consistent across policies that have implications for other countries and stakeholders. In the context of sustainable development, this would imply more attention being paid to consistency across aid, trade, agriculture, climate change, foreign direct investment finance and debt, remittance, migration and technology policies (UN DESA 2010). And while it is crucial that donors maintain their ODA and climate finance commitments, too great a focus on financial transfers could actually mitigate against the long-term interest of poor countries and global sustainable development if it allows rich

countries to avoid the tougher issues and effectively pay their way instead of enacting deep domestic reforms (Glennie 2012). In this context, aid agencies could develop new roles as enforcers of whole-of-government development policy coherence. Donor governments will have to justify the policy choices that they are making and money they are spending on non-national objectives. As Jonathan Glennie points out (2012, 4), public communication will have to be a central part development cooperation going forward. Taxpayers in developed countries are raising questions about the transfer of money from their own troubled economies to rapidly growing emerging economies. As such, Glennie argues the justifications for development cooperation may need to evolve, with mutual benefit possibly (re)emerging as a central justification in order to maintain high levels of public support. Such a shift would also better align with the perspective of poorest countries who are tired of being seen only as “recipients.” The global public goods narrative will need to convince constituencies that global sustainability is a matter of national self-interest (Glennie 2012).

While it is likely that other flows, such as trade, foreign direct investment and remittances, will attract greater levels of attention in the post-2015 development agenda, aid will still play a significant role in achieving development outcomes, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected states and many countries in sub-Saharan Africa. According to the OECD (2012), a key implication of adopting sustainable development for development cooperation would be its impact on future ODA flows. The OECD argues that adopting sustainable development would mean a mainstreaming of green growth into development cooperation and ensuring that support meets the needs of different types of developing countries. It recognizes that resilience – and improving information sharing, skills and technology to support it – would be a priority. It also sees a role for ODA in leveraging additional sources for sustainable development financing. The OECD suggests that adopting sustainable development could also require developing countries and development cooperation agencies to adopt natural capital accounting.

Despite these changes, the principles of aid effectiveness would still be highly relevant for the provision of ODA in the post-2015 context. As noted above, the post-2015 framework will likely include global goals with country-level targets. In providing assistance and support to developing countries, principles such as ownership and respect for context specificity, inclusive partnerships, alignment with country systems, managing for results, and transparency and accountability, which – building on previous commitments to aid effectiveness – were agreed to at the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, will remain hugely relevant for delivering effective aid to meet developing countries’ post-2015 implementation priorities.

#### **4. Financing a sustainable development agenda: implications for development cooperation**

A global development framework that is focused on poverty eradication *and* sustainable development will need to be underpinned by a broader and transformed set of financing mechanisms, including those that have typically fallen under the purview of development cooperation. Indeed, the Rio+20 outcome document called on “all countries to prioritize sustainable development in the allocation of resources in accordance with national priorities and needs” and recognized the “crucial importance of enhancing financial support from all sources for sustainable development for all countries, in particular developing countries” (UN 2012b).

What are the transformations required to finance a sustainable development agenda? What are the comparative advantages of different sources (origin of financial flows), channels (main routes or intermediaries through which public and private funds flow) and instruments (types of financial products) of finance?

An Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing was established by the UN following Rio+20 to address these questions and assess the financing needs and institutional arrangements required for sustainable development. The committee held its first meeting in August 2013, where it decided on the key issues that it would address. These included: assessing financing needs by sector and area, for the management of the global commons, and for different categories of countries; improving the effectiveness of public, private and blended finance and increasing the sources and amounts of finance for sustainable development; resource mobilization; and institutional arrangements for sustainable development goals (UN 2013e). This committee is expected to present its results to the UN Secretary-General in 2014 to inform his own recommendations to the UN General Assembly and for the intergovernmental negotiation process.

##### **4.1 Scale of financing**

While the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing will undoubtedly contribute to costing the post-2015 development framework and establishing the necessary financial and institutional arrangements for its realization, there are no solid estimates of the total cost of financing a sustainable development agenda at this time. Those that do exist typically focus either on financing needs for achieving the MDGs, climate finance or transitioning to a low-carbon global economy. Attempting to understand the scale of investment required to support sustainable development is, however, worthwhile.



It is notoriously difficult to estimate the total financing needs for achieving sustainable development. Indeed, the roles that tax revenue, private investment, trade and aid play in financing development needs depend on the economic and social conditions of a particular country (Sanchez et al. 2013). Nevertheless, it is widely recognised that the bulk of additional financing for sustainable development will be needed by developing countries (UNEP 2011; UN 2013c). On the environmental side, a 2011 study estimated that additional annual investment worth about 2 per cent of world gross product, or between US\$1.05 to US\$2.59 trillion, would be needed to attain sustainable development, with two-thirds of this investment needed in developing countries for the creation of new energy systems (UNEP 2011). Other estimates put financing, in terms of additional flows required for sustainable development, in the range of 1 to 2.5 per cent of global gross domestic product per year from 2010 to 2050 (UN 2013c). In their review of estimated financing needed for potential post-2015 goals on education, health, water and sanitation, sustainable energy, and food security, nutrition and agriculture, Greenhill and Ali (2013) suggest that somewhere between \$26 billion and \$50 billion per year will be required, over and above existing financing for each relevant sector. This estimate excludes financing for renewable energy, which requires between \$400 billion and \$900 billion per year in additional financing. Greenhill and Ali also caution that it is likely that the estimate is lower than what is actually required.

The coverage, assumptions and methodologies of studies differ, which results in varying estimates, yet all estimates are considerably greater than the existing resource envelope. Even if all concerned donor governments were to meet the international target of 0.7% of gross national income for their ODA, which would provide \$300.3 billion a year, and follow through on the Copenhagen Accord, which commits them to the provision of \$100 billion per year in climate financing for developing countries by 2020, there would still be a significant financing shortfall.

#### **4.2 Sources and channels of financing**

Given the scale of financing needs, dramatic increases in financing will be essential to promote and secure sustainable development. A mixture of public and private investments and domestic and international financial investments will be needed (UNSG 2013). Indeed, the UN System Task Team has argued that the post-2015 global partnership should aim to mobilise domestic public and private resources for development, external private resources and external public resources as well as improve development cooperation (UN 2013c). Financing for sustainable development will come from a range of sources, including domestic government budgets, debt relief, new domestic and international taxes, sovereign wealth funds, state capital, private capital, philanthropy, remittances, ODA and South-South cooperation.

There are a number of options and proposals for harnessing resources from these sources. At the country level, domestic resource mobilisation (DRM) is an important mechanism for financing sustainable development, though enthusiasm for DRM may need to be tempered given the structural factors that inhibit revenue generation for governments in developing countries, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa, such as inefficient and ineffective tax systems, significant tax exemptions, tax avoidance and capital flight (Bhushan, Samy and Medu 2013).<sup>14</sup> Governments will certainly need to exploit the potential of other domestic sources of finance. The removal of subsidies for fossil fuels or fisheries and ecological tax reform, for example, would reduce environmentally damaging activities and free up domestic government budgets (O'Connor 2012; UNCSD 2012). Governments will also need to develop the right incentives to encourage investment and innovation in the green economy, as well as shift consumer preferences (UN 2013c).

International taxes hold promise to increase financing for sustainable development. A financial or currency transaction tax has the potential to mobilise between \$2 billion and \$27 billion, a carbon tax has the potential to mobilise more than \$10 billion (depending on the tax per tonne) and a proposed levy on international transport has the potential to mobilise up to \$38 billion (O'Connor 2012; UNCSD 2012). Indeed, as Glennie (2012) notes, governments may come under more pressure to find ways to introduce international taxation, with the attraction of taxing “global public bads” being that a “bad” is diminished while money raised can be spent on securing and managing global public goods.

Private capital is clearly important and will need to play a heightened role in order to meet financing needs. The private sector has started to provide resources for the transition to a global green economy through domestic and international investment. One estimate suggests that 75 per cent of climate financing comes from private sources, while the remaining 25 per cent comes from public sources (UN ECOSOC 2012a). Optimistic estimates on climate financing going forward have the volume of financing at around US\$96.9 billion per year, with an average of US\$55 billion coming from the private sector (UN ECOSOC 2012a). Private flows remain small compared to investment needs and must be quickly scaled up (UNEP 2011). Of course, the private sector has limitations. Investments for sustainable development need to be long-term and predictable, which is not always feasible from a private sector perspective, and private sector financing may not always align with developing country needs or deliver what is intended (Atteridge 2011). This means that, particularly in low-income countries where the reach of the private sector

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<sup>14</sup> Greenhill and Ali (2013) suggest that developing countries should have the primary responsibility for financing the post-2015 development framework, but that efforts should be agreed on to support DRM, particularly reducing illicit flows and tax avoidance.

is low, expectations for what the private sector can deliver, at least in the short and medium term, should be managed accordingly.

Evidently, there remains a large and important role for the public sector to play. The UN Global Sustainability Panel suggests that public funds need to be strategically used to steer and leverage private finance (GSP2012). Greenhill and Ali (2013) add that this means making use of both ODA and non-ODA funds. For ODA, existing commitments and climate financing should be maintained. Recent OECD data show that 15 per cent, or US\$22.9 billion, of total ODA in 2010 went to climate change-related assistance in developing countries (UN ECOSOC 2012a). Despite broad consensus that climate financing must be “additional” and creative appeals to market and blended instruments, Rogerson (2012) forecasts that most contributions to climate financing are likely to continue to be drawn from ODA budgets as a result of budgetary squeezes, the persistence of debt crises and competing priorities. This situation indicates that development cooperation must play new and varied roles in a more expanded and complex financial landscape, including leveraging domestic resources and flows of private capital and supporting the design of innovative financing mechanisms (UNEP 2011).

The channels through which public and private finance can support sustainable development include multilateral development banks, international financial institutions, UN agencies, bilateral aid agencies, multilateral finance facilities, export credit agencies, carbon markets, capital markets and financial institutions such as local banks and building societies. Use of a range of financing instruments has also been proposed, such as policy incentives (e.g., subsidies), risk management (e.g., loan guarantees), carbon offsets, grants, concessional loans, market rate loans, equities (e.g., stocks), debt securities (e.g., bonds), and other financial products (e.g., trade credits).

It is clear that existing channels and instruments are not sufficient to fund a sustainable development agenda. Innovative financing instruments are being considered to finance gaps (UN DESA 2012). The importance of innovative financing was emphasised in the Rio+20 outcome document (UN 2012b).

In the area of climate change, innovative financing is still incipient but expected to be scaled up considerably in the years ahead. Total resources raised through innovative financing mechanisms over the past decade amount approximately to just \$1 billion, of which \$168 million was raised by the Adaptation Fund from a 2 per cent tax on transactions under the Clean Development Mechanism and \$841 million from Germany’s auctions of permits under the European Union’s Emission Trading Scheme. However, in the case of the Adaptation Fund, only \$30 million has been disbursed, half of which covered administration costs (UN DESA 2012). But the contribution of innovative financing

mechanisms to raising resources for climate financing has been limited so far and the climate financing gap remains huge. Indeed, small-scale mechanisms developed to date can fulfil just a fraction of financing needs. To really make an impact, larger-scale mechanisms will be necessary (UN DESA 2012).

More ambitious proposals, which have generated much enthusiasm from development cooperation experts largely because of the scale of financing that they could yield, have not yet been agreed on or implemented internationally. These include taxes on financial and currency transactions and greenhouse gas emissions, as well as the creation of new international liquidity through increased allocations of special drawing rights (SDRs) for development purposes by the International Monetary Fund. These proposals are technically feasible and implementation could mobilise around \$400 billion annually, making a significant contribution to meeting global financing needs. Policy makers have only discussed adopting a carbon tax on international travel, targeting aviation or maritime fuel. The prospects for the aforementioned proposals are thus small in the short term.

In the context of using international liquidity for global development purposes, UNDESA has recently published a policy brief examining SDRs (Spiegel, Herman and Vos 2012). SDRs, supplementary reserve assets that have value based on a basket of currencies, account for only 4 per cent of global official non-gold reserves, so there is significant room to increase allocations to countries. They could be used for development purposes either by skewing new allocations in favour of developing countries, which would reduce these countries' need to set aside foreign-exchange earnings in reserve holdings, or, more directly, by leveraging idle SDR allocations held by developed countries and emerging economies with abundant reserves. In the latter proposal, countries with excess reserves would buy bonds from multilateral development banks, thus enhancing these banks' lending capacities. With new annual allocations of SDRs, amounts of \$150 billion to \$250 billion could be raised annually in this way to finance long-term development. An alternative would be to create "trust funds" to leverage SDRs. In this proposal, \$100 billion in "SDR equity" could be used to back an issuance of \$1 trillion in bonds, using a leverage ratio of 10 to 1.

To date, there has been a lack of political will to implement such proposals. Granted, the financing needs associated with addressing global challenges are stark and there is political commitment to raising significant resources for development and for combating climate change in particular. Innovative financing mechanisms represent very promising options to raise funds on this scale.

A key issue will be how to consolidate the proliferation of financing channels and instruments, strengthen the key ones and enhance synergies to minimize complexity,

manage transactions costs and coordinate the proliferation of actors. For example, the numerous multilateral, bilateral and national climate funds that have emerged in recent years risk adding to the complexity of an already highly fragmented international aid architecture, within which 31 DAC donors operate 1,571 environmental partnerships, alongside more than 30 non-DAC donors and dozens of small multilateral environmental agencies (Castro and Hammond 2009). A similar situation exists across the development cooperation architecture, which has seen an incredible proliferation of multilateral development organizations (see Besada and Kindornay 2013). This proliferation of financing channels increases fragmentation, which has implications for how effectively sustainable development initiatives are implemented. The proliferation of both public and private channels could result in greater duplication, higher inefficiencies and higher transaction costs (UNCSD 2012).

Development cooperation has a vital role to play in applying lessons from aid effectiveness to a sustainable development agenda. Development cooperation is also uniquely placed to catalyse funding and innovation. As in the case of medicines, development cooperation can be used to overcome intellectual property rights barriers, help investments to occur at the global and regional (rather than national) levels and fund “demonstration” projects that can be replicated using private funds (UN ECOSOC 2012a). Innovative financing mechanisms will just be part of the solution – DRM in developing countries will be key. Development cooperation can ramp up efforts to support DRM and can support these efforts through international tax cooperation to reduce tax avoidance and evasion (UN DESA 2012).

## **5. A new institutional framework in support of a sustainable development agenda**

A universal post-2015 development framework calls for transformed, “fit-for-purpose” mechanisms of institutional support. A shift in the focus of international development to poverty eradication in the context of sustainable development will need to be accompanied by changes to institutional frameworks at the global and national levels.

### **5.1 Global level**

The HLP recommended a “single locus of accountability” within the UN to oversee the post-2015 development agenda, a periodic high-level review of progress against the post-2015 goals and the production of a global sustainable development outlook report every one or two years. It also proposed that monitoring, reporting and peer review be supported at the regional level (HLP 2013, 21-22).

It is likely that the new High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, which was agreed to at Rio+20, has replaced the UN Commission on Sustainable Development and met for the first time in September 2013, will position itself to play a key role in the post-2015 period. Indeed, the UN General Assembly asserted that the High-Level Political Forum “shall provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development, follow up and review progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments ... and have a focused, dynamic and action-oriented agenda” (UN 2013a, 3). While the High-Level Political Forum will surely play a central role in developing the post-2015 institutional architecture, arrangements will be needed to “ensure coherence and coordination between different policy processes, institutions and stakeholders at a systemic level” (UN 2013d, 2). According to the UN System Task Team, such coordination will be key to promoting a more coherent international financial and economic architecture that supports sustainable development as well as allocating resources (UN 2013c).

The institutional lead on the emerging post-2015 global partnership will have the challenge of bringing together the wider UN system, Group of Twenty, Group of 77 and other official stakeholders, as well as civil society and the private sector. The UN System Task Team argues that this will be critical to aligning the international financial and economic architecture with sustainable development and human rights goals, as well as addressing systemic issues such as capital flow management (UN 2013c). In order to achieve a coherent post-2015 institutional arrangement, consistent communication between different international decision making fora, including regional bodies, must be ensured and reforms made where necessary (UN 2013c). The UN System Task Team also points out that the need to ensure developing country voices are heard in multilateral processes remains.

## **5.2 National level**

Putting sustainable development at the heart of international development efforts requires a shift in the focus of core strategies, such as poverty reduction strategies and national development plans. The HLP (2013) suggested that countries establish their targets for contributing to the post-2015 goals through participatory planning processes at the national level. National development plans have been identified as a primary instrument for integrating and balancing economic, social and environmental concerns (Australian Government/UN ECOSOC 2012).

Agenda 21 called for each country to develop a national sustainable development strategy (NSDS) and the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development called on governments to take immediate steps to progress these strategies. As of 2009, UN DESA found that 106

countries were implementing a NSDS based on reporting to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (UN DESA 2013).

A NSDS has been defined as “a coordinated, participatory and iterative process of thoughts and actions to achieve economic, environmental and social objectives in a balanced and integrated manner” (UN DESA 2002, 8). Over the past two decades, a variety of strategies has been prepared under the broad NSDS “banner”, including strategies particularly focused on sustainable development, growth and, perhaps most notably, poverty reduction (in the form of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers) (Allen forthcoming). Overall, the strategy development experience has had mixed results and the balanced integration of the three pillars of sustainable development has not always been a prominent feature. Indeed, the 1990s and 2000s saw first- and second-generation Poverty Reduction Strategies dominate the national planning landscapes of developing countries and donors, as well as development cooperation in general. These strategies had limited focus on environmental sustainability issues.

More recent efforts to promote sustainable development at the national level include green economy, green growth, climate change and low-emission development strategies (Allen forthcoming). The UN Development Programme estimates that over 80 countries have green, climate-resilient or low-emission development strategies. These strategies have been driven by financing through the Global Environment Facility, Least Developed Countries Fund, Special Climate Change Fund and the Adaptation Fund (UNDP 2013). In contrast, the OECD and International Energy Agency found that by 2010 at least 46 countries – 30 developed and 16 developing countries – had produced a national climate change strategy or low-emission development strategy (OECD and IEA 2010). Notably, a variety of national green economy and green growth strategies and low-emission development strategies have emerged. For low-income countries, the focus is often placed on establishing the necessary capacities, institutions and governance arrangements to implement green economy policies and access emerging international climate finance. There are clear attempts to identify priority actions that can deliver win-win outcomes in an integrated way for economic growth, job creation, food security, access to essential services, and climate change adaptation and mitigation, as well as broader environmental outcomes such as biodiversity protection and conservation. Such strategies can be seen as iterations of NSDSs that seek to more effectively integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development in response to ongoing global crises and emerging international priorities (Allen forthcoming).

## 6. Conclusion

The real and urgent threat that climate change and environmental degradation pose to global prosperity, security and welfare suggests that the focus of international development will likely move from poverty reduction to poverty eradication in the context of sustainable development. This will have significant implications for development cooperation.

One concrete way that observers will be able to identify how far the pendulum is ready to swing will be to assess the next set of global development goals. Two processes – the SDGs and post-2015 development agenda – are currently in motion, though it is likely that these will merge. One key question will be how central environmental sustainability and protection will be in the next set of global goals.

A shift to a sustainable development agenda will involve maintaining a focus on eradicating extreme poverty while limiting the global ecological footprint through a transition to a global green economy and sustainable management of global public goods. Such a shift necessitates a change in the way that development is implemented, financed and organised. As highlighted in this background study, this change means using ODA to harness and leverage private sources of financing and investment and enhancing policy coherence for development. It also requires institutions at the national and global levels to put sustainable development at the centre of their mandates.

This change will not be straightforward and will require development cooperation actors to reorient their mandates and focus. This background study sought to lay some conceptual groundwork to inform discussion about why and how this can happen.



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