



Shaping a sustainable future: partners in development

Key messages

Australia High-Level Symposium—Development Cooperation Forum
14–15 May 2012, Brisbane, Australia



Sustainable development was established as a guiding vision for development efforts of all countries at the Rio Summit in 1992. Since then, development cooperation actors have strived to address the challenges and barriers to achieving sustainable development. Sustainable development is a dynamic process of adaptation, learning and action that recognises and understands the need to act on interconnections between the economy, society and natural environment.

A sustainable development pathway is now non-negotiable. The world is reaching social and environmental tipping points. A global change is required as few countries, rich or poor, have succeeded in fully integrating economic, social and environmental sustainability in their development strategies.

The focus of the two-day Australia High-Level Symposium, Shaping a Sustainable Future—Partners in Development Cooperation, was to discuss the nexus between development cooperation and sustainable development.

Delegates representing a wide range of sectors—high-level policymakers, national parliaments, multilateral organisations, civil society organisations and the private sector—recognised the challenges.

Five key messages emerged from the discussion that can inform preparations for Rio+20, in June 2012, and are to be taken to the United Nations Development Cooperation Forum, in July 2012:

- i. Implementing sustainable development is urgent—we are reaching environmental and social tipping points
- ii. Achieving sustainable development results takes time and we should take stock of lessons learned
- iii. Development cooperation has an important role to play in sustainable development
- iv. Integration of sustainable development into development pathways is important
- v. In drawing up the post-2015 development agenda, lessons should be learned from the current framework—simple messaging and measurable goals work.

1. Implementing sustainable development is urgent—we are reaching environmental and social tipping points

“Evidence shows that the way we’ve been doing development is not sustainable—it’s putting pressure on our ecology, it’s leading to poverty, and it’s creating greater inequality.”

Delegate, Australia High-Level Symposium – Development Cooperation Forum, 2012

The current path of global growth is not sustainable. The world will need at least 50 per cent more food by the year 2030, as well as 45 per cent more energy and 30 per cent more water. Our planet is under stress. This in turn exacerbates the stress on humanity as a whole. Sustainability affects every person on this planet, in rich countries as well as poor. It is time to make the investment in our global future by focusing on sustainable development.

Messages

- > **The harnessing of global investment flows towards sustainable development is an immediate priority.** Key areas include energy efficiency, infrastructure, agriculture, construction, forest conservation, and production and consumption patterns.
- > Rapid globalisation has intensified interlinkages, increasing regional and transboundary issues. **Cooperation on sustainable development needs to take place at all levels**—global, regional and national.

2. Achieving sustainable development results takes time; partners should take stock of lessons learned

“A long-term view is essential to achieving sustainable development outcomes.”

Delegate, Australia High-Level Symposium – Development Cooperation Forum, 2012

Sustainable development and poverty eradication are both urgent and long-term endeavours requiring a gradual and substantial redirection of policies and finance. Development cooperation for sustainable development should consider a longer-term timeline with greater emphasis on results and impact on poverty reduction. Long-term engagement and predictability are critical enablers for sustainable development. Donors must demonstrate that they are there for the long haul, as long-term partners.

Development cooperation must build on the recent gains in results-based management to build a strong Monitoring and Evaluation framework that successfully integrates the three sustainable development pillars. Leadership from both donors and recipient governments is important to develop a shared vision of what sustainable development looks like.

“We are not working with a blank slate.”

Delegate, Australia High-Level Symposium – Development Cooperation Forum, 2012

The international community has had 20 years, since the Rio Earth Summit, to implement sustainable development practices. While there has been a large number of successful experiences,

there is still much needed to do before it is recognised as the norm. Although the task can seem overwhelming, it is not. The meeting highlighted a number of partnership successes to build on.

Messages

- > **In challenging economic circumstances, aid has to be sustained and predictable.** Ensuring that donor countries have bipartisan support for development cooperation can ensure aid predictability beyond the political cycle.
- > **Aid can serve as a catalyst within a robust regulatory framework.** Further work is needed to see where aid can unlock other sources of funding.
- > **Activities need to be scalable and have long-term and sustained funding.**
- > **A careful balance is needed between short-term results and long-term objectives.** There is a strong need to ensure that long term approaches are reflected in national development plans.
- > Each country has its specific needs and vulnerabilities. **Sustainable development responses must be tailored to the local context.**
- > **The UN Development Cooperation Forum can play a role in information sharing and dissemination, analysing lessons learned and building on successes.**

3. Development cooperation is playing an important role in sustainable development

“Predictability, transparency and long-term engagement are important for recipient countries as we walk down a sustainable development pathway.”

Delegate, Australia High-Level Symposium –
Development Cooperation Forum, 2012

Development cooperation is more than just aid, it helps ensure policy coherence and access to technologies and markets. It is also about fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships and mobilising other development finance that promotes sustainability. Development cooperation provides the means of implementation.

National ownership, aid transparency, donor harmonisation and partnerships are crucial principles to ensure that development cooperation has an effective and efficient impact on sustainable development.

Messages

- > **The current development cooperation model stretches the capacity of all actors.** The duplication of efforts across international institutions (UN, G20, OECD etc) and the number of unfulfilled development commitments. There is a strong need for consistency and coherence.
- > **Sustainable development cooperation must be demand-driven.** Too often, development interventions miss the mark as they are not aligned with national goals and plans. It is time to put program countries firmly in the driver’s seat.
- > **Aid transparency needs to be taken seriously.** Recipients have the right to know how donors are spending money in their country and seek clarity on the results of development cooperation. Conversely, donor country tax payers have the right to know how their money is being spent and whether it is being used effectively. By making aid transparent, development actors will be made more accountable for sustainable development results.
- > **Mutual accountability frameworks should be broadened to include a focus on sustainable development.** Irrespective of different country contexts, national aid policies should reflect agreed sustainable development priorities from all sectors.

- > **Progress has been made in donor harmonisation, but more needs to be done.** Fragmentation in aid programs remains a major constraint. Donors cannot be effective if they try to be “all things to all people”; their support must be more strategic to have more impact. By delegating cooperation and channeling increased funding through multilaterals, development agencies can avoid duplication, decrease fragmentation and reduce administrative burdens. Aid dollars can then go further, including in supporting sustainable development results.
- > **Partnerships are a means to achieving sustainable development, not an end in themselves.** Successful partnerships have a number of common elements: mutual respect and trust, strong and effective governance, adequate financial flows, joint accountability and transparency, technological innovation and performance measurement.
- > **Aid alone will not be sufficient for the transition to sustainable development.** However, public policies can redirect capital and help reduce the financing costs for developing countries. Further efforts are needed to draw on private sector financing sources and innovation for sustainable development outcomes. Areas of possible improvement include: establishing price signals to value sustainability (e.g., through differentiated taxation); strengthening regulation; introducing emissions trading systems; developing sustainable development criteria for public procurement; encouraging widespread adoption of sustainable development criteria in investment; developing risk-sharing mechanisms and enhancing the certainty of long-term regulatory and policy frameworks to incentivise private investment in sustainable industries.

4. Greater focus on integrating sustainable development and poverty reduction is needed

“It is time we stopped thinking of sustainable development as an environment issue. It is about integrating economic, social and environmental dimensions of development.”

Delegate, Australia High-Level Symposium – Development Cooperation Forum, 2012

Sustainable development seeks a more holistic treatment of economic, social and environmental dimensions of development.

To transition towards sustainable development, development cooperation should put people at the centre of its efforts. Development cooperation has an important role in continuing to support vulnerable communities. This is increasingly important with new threats such as climate change and food insecurity.

Messages

- > **Development cooperation can only have long-term impact if all three dimensions of sustainable development—economic, social and environment—are taken into account.**
- > **National development plans should be the primary instrument for integrating economic, social and environmental dimensions of development.**
- > **A number of lessons highlight the importance of developing capacity.** Answers to sustainable development are at least as likely to come from the South as from the North. Learning must be seen as a “two-way street”. Capacities in sustainable development planning need to be strengthened across global, regional, national and sub-national levels. Capacities also need to be strengthened so people can participate and benefit from the wider changes in the economy.

5. A post-2015 framework for sustainable development needs to remain simple and aspirational

“Sustainable development goals are important. However, they must not be homogenous. They must be flexible in terms of application at the national level and responsive to different countries realities.”

Delegate, Australia High-Level Symposium – Development Cooperation Forum, 2012

We will need to work cooperatively over the next three years to deliver a post-2015 framework that will be effective in transitioning to sustainable development. This is very ambitious; the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) took 12 years to finalise. In drawing up the post-2015 development agenda, lessons should be learned from the current framework. The MDGs show us that simple messages work best. Partners need to avoid overcomplicating the message and work together towards one shared global agenda.

A wide range of institutions are striving to achieve sustainable development through development cooperation efforts. These include multilateral institutions (UN OECD and G20), private sector institutions (World Business Council for Sustainable Development and UN Global Compact) and financial institutions (Multilateral Development Banks, Global Environment Facility and Climate Investment Funds). To ensure global institutions are able to support a post-2015 framework, it is important that they work collaboratively and collectively, to ensure

greater coherence to international efforts to deliver on sustainable development priorities.

Messages

- > **Goals are needed to guide development efforts beyond 2015.**
- > **Development goals should continue to be aspirational. They should be simple and easy to measure.** The goals must have a robust accountability framework and all stakeholders will have a role to play in ensuring accountability to the goals.
- > **Rio+20 will provide guidance on what the post 2015 development framework might include.** The outcome of Rio+20 can set the foundation of a future global sustainable development compact, fully integrating sustainable development and poverty eradication as its overarching focus.
- > **The DCF has a role to play in the follow-up to Rio and the definition of the development agenda beyond 2015.** The 2012 Development Cooperation Forum should launch and guide the implementation of the outcome of Rio+20. It should consult on the implementation of the Busan Global Partnership for effective development cooperation.