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Abstract (summary)

The post-2015 global development framework.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are due to expire in 2015. Since they have achieved partial success, work has begun on crafting a post-2015 framework. On a separate track, the Rio+20 UN Conference has called for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be formulated.

Full text

SUBJECT:The post-2015 global development framework.

SIGNIFICANCE:The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are due to expire in 2015. Since they have achieved partial success, work has begun on crafting a post-2015 framework. On a separate track, the Rio+20 UN Conference has called for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be formulated.

ANALYSIS: Impacts.

The political context of the new framework will shift from aid relationships to the provision of global public goods and their financing.

Despite continuing disagreement in climate negotiations, the new framework will have to include at least one global environmental goal.

Yet an accurate measure of sustainable development will remain elusive.

The work of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, co-chaired by UK Prime Minister David Cameron and Presidents Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (Liberia) and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (Indonesia) will be brought into alignment with the UN General Assembly's Open Working Group on SDGs. This is likely to occur soon after the High-Level Panel has presented its report in May 2013. The aim thereafter will be to present a set of unified poverty and environmental goals, probably sometime in 2014. Yet the political process leading to this will be arduous.

SDGs.

The Rio+20 UN Conference last year specified that SDGs "should be coherent with and integrated" into the UN development agenda beyond 2015. This seeks to 'mainstream' sustainable development in the wider UN system (see *INTERNATIONAL: Rio+20 takes incremental approach - June 26, 2012*):

The conference stated that such goals "should be action-oriented, concise and easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries".

However, the technical and political challenges in meeting these criteria are formidable.

MDG lessons .

The MDGs that will expire in 2015 faced complaints that the goals chosen were incoherent, consisting partly of genuine outcome goals like poverty reduction, of input goals like enrolling more children in primary school, of process goals -- "ensure environmental sustainability" -- and of simple expressions of various international concerns (see *INTERNATIONAL: MDGs face post-2015 rethink - June 15, 2010*).

View Image - As global goals, they did not have an underpinning set of national targets. By 2015, some will be met and some will not. Where an important goal like poverty reduction has been achieved, it has been driven by the efforts of one populous, fast growing economy -- China.

Yet the MDGs have been a success at the political level, providing a basis for mobilising political activity and public opinion around development issues. They have supported increases in official development assistance (ODA), and probably helped to direct more of it to sub-Saharan Africa.

On the other hand, there is not much evidence that the existence of the MDGs has had any impact in shaping national policies in developing countries. Indeed, scholars Charles Kenny and Andy Sumner were unable to find any connections between policies on the ground and countries' 'ownership' of the MDGs.

More of the same?.

View Image - The easiest agreement for the international community to make would be to set up the post-2015 development framework along very similar lines to the preceding MDGs. Yet a strategy of continuation is unlikely to remain relevant for the next one or two decades for at least three reasons:

Outdated terminology.

Dividing the world into two blocks of countries labelled 'developed' and 'developing', the former sending aid to the latter, looks outmoded in an increasingly multi-polar world and does not fit with targets "universally applicable to all countries".

Declining aid importance.

Official aid is a declining source of development finance. While in 1990 aid made up 60% of development finance, by 2008 aid's share was only 20%. Remittances, flows from private foundations and foreign direct investment have all expanded their share. This trend is likely to continue.

Location of the poor.

As more of the world's poor people live in middle income countries, the power of poverty reduction as a goal to enthuse people and mobilise their support will decline, and setting poverty reduction targets for rich and poor countries alike would seem strange.

Sustainable development.

With the adoption after 2015 of goals based solely on poverty reduction seeming inadequate and sustainability an increasingly important issue in global development, 'green' issues are certain to have an important role in the new framework.

Definition.

The concept of sustainability relates to whether a current state of development can be maintained (or improved on) in the future. Two elements of uncertainty surround questions of sustainable development -- how current eco-environmental trends will play out in the future, and how these eco-environmental scenarios will affect people's well-being.

Multi-dimensional development.

Advocates of the human development paradigm have argued successfully that human well-being is multi-dimensional (see *INTERNATIONAL: 'Human development' needs a re-think - September 25, 2012* and see *INTERNATIONAL: Poverty aspects challenge policymakers - December 21, 2011*). This implies that the goal of sustainable development should be not just to sustain the current level of natural capital, but also other forms of capital -- physical, human and social -- since they also influence the quality of life.

Relation between dimensions.

This raises the question of how the different dimensions are to be treated vis-a-vis one another. One choice is to allow compensation for deficiencies in one dimension with good performance in other dimensions. This is known as 'weak sustainability'. 'Strong sustainability' is to insist on the separate maintenance of levels of quantity and quality in each of the dimensions.

Sustainable development indicators.

Several indicators of sustainable development have been proposed, with none emerging as the definitive answer to the issue of how to measure it.

Ecological Footprint.

The Ecological Footprint (EF) measures how much of the regenerative capacity of the biosphere is used up by human activities related to consumption. Its basis is a calculation of the amount of biologically productive land plus the water area required to support a given population at its current level of consumption:

A country's footprint represents its demand for land to produce food, fibre and timber, to absorb the waste that it generates and to provide space for its infrastructure or built-up areas.

It has been calculated that humanity's EF has been larger than the total carrying capacity of the planet since the 1980s.

Since then, the size of the gap between the EF and the planet's bio-capacity has been increasing.

EF, like GDP increase, generates a single headline figure. From that point of view, it satisfies the demand for a goal that is concise and easy to communicate. The percentage by which human activity exceeds the planet's bio-capacity has a clarity and simplicity that has helped it to penetrate the public's consciousness.

On the other hand, it has weaknesses as a measure of sustainable development. It ignores the problem of resource depletion, assumes that different forms of natural capital are substitutes and (used as a national target) has a strong anti-trade bias. Perhaps its most important weakness is that it is focused solely on the sustainability of natural capital. That is very important, but it is not the only issue that arises in ensuring sustainable development.

'Green' national accounts.

The concept of sustainability is not directly addressed in the UN's efforts since 1992 to spread a system of economic and environmental accounting (SEEA) -- or 'green GDP accounting' (see *INTERNATIONAL: 'Green GDP' gauge spreads slowly - August 20, 2012*). What this does is to adjust the GDP calculation for the previously absent depletion of, or damage to, environmental resources to give a more realistic picture of whether genuine economic growth is occurring. Yet it does not indicate whether the current level of 'green GDP' will be sustainable in the future.

Measures of stocks of wealth.

Sustainability is about the capacity of countries to carry forward sufficient stocks of different kinds to generate future flows of services that are no smaller than those currently enjoyed. Attempts to measure this capacity at the national level by indicators of adjusted net savings or changes in extended concepts of wealth have had the undesirable result of showing the developed countries -- which have much larger consumption of exhaustible resources and emission of pollutants -- as being on a sustainable path, and developing countries, which supply the resources, as being on an unsustainable path.

Carbon footprint as a global goal?

The EF measure is driven by only one of the three forms of environmental damage that it covers. The land used to provide food, fibre and timber and to provide space for urban infrastructure cannot, by definition, exceed the land available, so any measured excess of bio-capacity usage over bio-capacity must arise from excessive usage of available capacity to absorb pollutants. In that case, it would be more economical to replace the EF with a measure like the carbon footprint, which is focused on the key pollutant of concern, carbon dioxide (see *INTERNATIONAL: Emissions cuts are off target - February 10, 2012*).

The main difficulty here is that any such value is linked to a related target rise in global temperature, because the two are correlated. However, the rise in global temperature that the international community is prepared to tolerate is subject to considerable disagreement in the continuing international negotiations at the Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (see *INTERNATIONAL: Climate talks clear agenda - December 10, 2012*).

Developing countries, through the G77, have adopted strong negotiating positions in the UNFCCC discussions. They maintain that:

responsibility for causing global warming lies with the developed countries -- many developing countries will resist any absolute targets for reducing carbon emissions, because such targets would lock in historic inequities and infringe their right to develop;

the burden of reducing carbon emissions must rest with the countries that have benefited from emitting carbon, not with those who may benefit by emitting carbon in the future;

there should be no target for the global rise in temperature, because that would imply that once the industrial countries had announced their carbon reduction pledges the residual reduction would have to be made up by the developing countries; and

industrial countries should make finance and technology available to developing countries for adaptation to and mitigation of climate change effects, but such transfers should not be made on condition of meeting particular mitigation targets (see *INTERNATIONAL: Climate change funds pose challenges - September 7, 2011*).

View Image - However, unofficially, the desired maximum rise in global temperature became a matter of contention among developing countries themselves. While some are prepared to agree to a maximum rise of 2.0 degrees Celsius, the Association of Small Island States declared its preference for a limitation of warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

The recently concluded UNFCC meeting in Doha did renew the Kyoto Protocol until 2020, but the commitments of the remaining signatories now cover only 15% of global gas emissions. The goal of a maximum global temperature increase of 2 degrees Celsius was affirmed, but International Energy Authority projections suggest that it is rapidly becoming irrelevant due to continuing strong demand for fossil fuel-generated energy (see *INTERNATIONAL: China and climate are key for coal - November 30, 2012*).

CONCLUSION: Proposals to continue the current, mainly anti-poverty goals after 2015 are unlikely to be accepted, given the need for goals that are universally applicable, rather than being part of a

donor-recipient aid bargain. It is inevitable that the post-2015 framework will include new targets related to the slowing of environmental damage. This is despite the absence of straightforward indicators to underpin gauges of sustainable development -- carbon footprint is the most promising candidate as an environmental target. However, since carbon emissions are linked to the rise in average global temperature -- the subject of unresolved disagreement in UN negotiations -- an international deal on a target value for carbon footprint may be out of reach.

Indexing (details)

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