

The MDGs Beyond 2015

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Abstract With six years to go, the world has a mixed record with regard to the achievement of the MDGs – a set of time-bound quantitative development targets the world set for itself in 2000 to reduce human poverty. The progress towards the MDGs has been halted because of recent food, fuel and financial crises. This article portrays a picture for beyond 2015. It identifies six distinctive issues: sets of goals and targets; assessment of needs; policies and strategies; resources and coordination; monitoring progress and gaps; reporting. The article argues that beyond 2015, the present set of MDG goals and targets will need to be re-evaluated and reminds us that the 2010 review of the MDGs provides a unique opportunity to the whole world not only to accelerate MDG efforts for 2010–15, but also to initiate a discussion of these issues in preparation for beyond 2015.

1 Introduction

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are time-bound quantitative goals to reduce some aspects of human poverty by 2015. These goals are derived from the Millennium Declaration, agreed upon by 189 Heads of States and Governments during the Millennium Summit in 2000. Thus the MDGs, which are analytically anchored in the human development and the human rights paradigm, represent a global commitment and compact (Jahan 2003a,d).

Over all these years, the world has seen initiatives at global, regional and country levels to achieve the MDGs. There has been public advocacy in support of the MDGs, the Goals have been incorporated as long-term objectives in various national development plans and poverty reduction strategies; policies, strategies and resources frameworks have been aligned with the Goals, there have been resource commitments from the developed to the developing world and last but not the least, the MDG progress and gaps have been monitored and assessed.

At the end of all these, with five more years to go, we now have a mixed picture in terms of MDG achievements and gaps (UN 2009). Some regions and countries have been doing better than others and some Goals and Targets are on track compared with others. In some countries, some Goals were reached and some were on

track. In others, no Goal was reached and most of them were off track. In some countries, the present Goals have made complete sense, while in others, a new set of goals seem to be more relevant.

The picture has become more blurred because of a series of crises: food, energy, financial and economic shocks. Achievement of the MDGs seems to be more difficult in most countries; countries which were on-track now appear to be off-track. Resource flows from the developed to the developing world are shrinking and market access is not expanding.

As we move towards 2015, the critical question is not necessarily whether countries will achieve the MDGs by 2015, but rather, are they on track? One has to take a pragmatic view, rather than a mechanical one. In that context, it will be of immense importance whether the MDGs are adequately tailored to the country context. It will also be crucial to identify whether they are part of a country's long-term development plan or its poverty reduction strategies; whether both resource and capacity needs for remaining on track have been assessed; whether strategies have been linked to a resource framework; whether necessary resources have been mobilised and required capacities have been developed. One key element is whether there is a well-defined implementation plan. There will have to be an

assessment of progress and gaps with adequate disaggregation, so that by 2015, we know exactly where we stand.

We are all aware that a number of these issues will be discussed and decided during the 2010 MDG review. The review will also bring forward results for what has worked and what has not in the context of MDG achievement; why there have been wide variations in outcomes and how, in the context of all crises, volatilities and uncertainties, the world may put together its heads, hearts and hands to put the MDGs on track. The crises should not be used as excuses to move away from the MDGs; rather they strengthen the case for greater efforts and resources. In this context, the review will also focus on the whole issue of the role of the UN system and the Bretton Woods Institutions for the achievement of the MDGs.

Even after all of this, the world may wake up on 1 January 2016 and find that it has not achieved the targets that it set for itself 15 years ago. In all probability, it seems that there may not be a single developing country which will achieve all the MDGs – many countries will achieve some, but not all of them, and some countries may achieve none. The critical question is whether the world is prepared, in the context of the MDGs, for beyond 2015. The present article is an attempt to raise some critical issues for discussion as we approach 2015.

Five overall issues will be of paramount importance for beyond 2015 as far as MDGs are concerned:

- 1 The set of Goals and Targets
- 2 Assessment of needs
- 3 Policies and strategies
- 4 Resources, institutions and coordination
- 5 Monitoring progress/gaps and reporting.

2 Sets of Goals and Targets¹

In spite of their success, the notion that the current sets of Goals and Targets can be extrapolated beyond 2015 has to be questioned. The world is changing with new development issues and challenges. In five years time, the canvas will change even more and a simple continuation of the current set will not be desirable – either politically or in terms of development challenges. Preparing for the global targets beyond 2015 also provides an opportunity

to learn from lessons so far, to address some of the valid comments and suggestions that have been made by friends and foes alike.

2.1 Number and structure of Goals and Targets

As we move beyond 2015, there will be arguments for new goals, even at the global level, partly because there will be new development challenges (e.g. climate change); partly because some of current goals may have been achieved in the majority of countries (e.g. primary education) and partly because of the pressure in many quarters to bring some of the issues (e.g. human rights) from the Declaration to the Goals. But two things must be borne in mind. First, the success of the MDGs is related to their concise nature. Overburdening them will destroy the robustness and power of the set. Second, irrespective of how many we include, any set of goals and targets will not be adequate to totally cover the many dimensions of human development, in which the MDGs are anchored. Thus, defining the content of the MDGs will require tough choices and hard trade-offs and a strong but fair gatekeeper will be called for.

In this context, it may be useful to revisit the structure of the MDGs. For example, in the current set, there are three health-related Goals (i.e. child mortality, maternal health and infectious diseases). Can they be collapsed into one health Goal, making room for the inclusion of other areas of concern, without unduly increasing their number? In the ultimate analysis, the world may retain some of the original MDGs, restructure some of the existing ones and add some new ones.

2.2 Benchmarks

By expressing themselves as halving extreme poverty and reducing child mortality by two-thirds, most of the MDGs are in relative terms. Thus, most MDGs tend to put the poorest countries at a disadvantage, as proportional changes tend to be inversely related to the initial level. If there is a new set of targets, it will have to consider the implications of both relative and absolute benchmarks. Progress can be measured by both and targets can be formulated in ways that capture both absolute and relative frameworks.

2.3 Time horizon

One of the major issues, if the world decides to have a new set of MDG Goals and Targets, will be

that of a time horizon. If the idea is to focus on a time span of one generation, then it should go for 2040, as a 25-year time period is thought to reflect that. In fact, that was the reason why the time period of 1990–2015 for the first set of MDGs was chosen. The choice of the starting year coincided with a series of world summits and conferences. Although MDGs are to be achieved during 1990–2015, they were only issued in 2000.

2.4 Tailoring, localisation and disaggregation

As we move beyond 2015, three issues need to be emphasised more aggressively in the area of any set of goals and targets. First, along with global targets, the focus should also be heavy on tailoring them to the national context and localise them. Second, efforts should be made for further disaggregation of indicators and data along gender, ethnicity and racial lines, rural–urban divide and regional variations. Third, consistency, robustness and frequency of up-to-date data will have to be enhanced. In the ultimate analysis, it makes more sense if we look at the progress of a particular society inter-temporarily, rather than across societies. In that context, the issue of baseline, the targets set and the time horizon chosen for the society becomes important and we do not end up assessing a country using inappropriate yardsticks.

2.5 Consultations

Whatever the world decides, in terms of set of goals and targets beyond 2015, it will require broad-based consultations with different stakeholders, both at global and national levels (Jahan 2003b). It will need solid substance and political pragmatism. The political, inter-governmental process of preparing the post-2015 period is likely to gain momentum after 2010, or at the latest, by 2012. Thus, before the political process kicks off in 2015, there is room for a substantive debate over two–three years, which will offer a range of options and possibilities to the inter-governmental process.

It is crucial to organise both the substantive and political processes so that they are, and are perceived as, interactive and iterative. The outcomes will be maximised if these processes take place at global, regional and country levels.

3 Assessment of needs

Beyond 2015, the assessments of needs will have to take a different course from that during the

first decade of 2000–10. The need assessment in the post-2015 period will have to address the issue of resource need, but not focus exclusively on it or costing, as has been the case during the preceding decade. The need assessment beyond 2015 will have to focus on three areas.

3.1 What worked and what did not

Beyond 2015, there will be a critical need to have a good understanding of what worked and what did not during 2000–15. As we all know, the experiences with the MDGs were quite diversified in terms of outcomes and achievements. The same amount of resources produced impressive results in one context, but not in others. The same set of policies worked in one country, while it did not in another. Thus, as we move forward, it is important to learn from our lessons of earlier initiatives. If constraints to positive outcomes can be identified, that will help in designing the interventions for the post-2015 period.

3.2 Capacity gaps

The pre-2015 period focused on the formulation of MDG plans and strategies, but less so with regard to implementation. Only in these later years, are we stressing the issue of successful implementation and actually working on various aspects of it. One of the areas that have come up as a major constraint to implementation is the capacity gap at country level (Jahan 2006). The gap can take different forms: lack of capacity in strategy formulation, absence of capacity in such issues as procurement, or a capacity gap in monitoring.

Building on these assessments, the capacity gap matrix in the post-2015 era will have to be identified quickly. Once that is done, capacity development plans must be put in place.

3.3 Alliance gap

In most of the countries, MDGs were mainly driven by the governments. Even though in some cases civil society has been involved in broad-based dialogues on the MDGs, in most cases, they were excluded when policies and strategies were formulated. The majority of cases have failed to integrate the private sector into the process, even though as a crucial development actor it has much to contribute. The partnership between national and external actors was also not optimal in many situations.

In these contexts, in the post-2015 period, it is imperative that we assess the alliance-nexus for the MDGs in various situations, identify the constraints and come up with concrete suggestions as to how an optimal nexus can be developed. Of course, the composition and the nexus of the alliance will be different in different situations, but the idea is we need to address some of the gaps that were there. More public and policy advocacy may be needed.

3.4 Linkages between MDG 8 and the other MDGs

So far, the discussion and the implementation of the MDGs has been done in such a fashion that there seems to have been a delinking between MDG 8 and other MDGs. Part of the delinking is the outcome of the fact that MDG 8 is a combination of many issues, ranging from trade to debt, to youth employment, while the other seven MDGs are quite specific. Partly, this is because only MDG 8 talks explicitly of a global compact, while the other seven do not and partly because the MDG 8 is not time-bound. As a result, the issues of whether there has been serious progress in MDG 8, and its positive relationship with the other seven MDGs, have never been explicitly addressed.

Considering this, it will be useful if in the post-2015 period there is an initial assessment of the transmission mechanisms of how improvements in development cooperation – for example more trade opportunities, opening of markets, addressing debt and intellectual property rights issues – might positively impact on other MDGs. Such an exercise will also help countries assess whether a minimum domestic resource envelope is needed.

4 Policies and strategies

A review of the policies and strategies in the pre-2015 period highlights some general trends. First, at least during the first half (2000–05) of the first decade (2000–10), poverty reduction and the MDGs were pursued as parallel processes. Thus, during that period in many countries, there were poverty reduction strategies and MDG strategies. This created confusion, duplication and turf-wars. If the MDGs are the long-term objectives of a society, they should be an integral part of any poverty reduction strategy. Second, because of policy and public advocacy, during the second half (2005–10) of the decade, the MDGs were integrated as long-term development objectives of

many poverty reduction strategies in different countries. But in most cases, even though the MDGs constituted the long-term objectives, neither the strategies nor the resource framework were aligned with them. Thus the MDGs in many poverty reduction strategies remain as ornaments. Third, the achievement of the MDGs is not exclusively resource-centric. Resources are a necessary requirement of the MDGs, but they are not a sufficient condition for MDG achievement. Resources have to be complemented with policies, strategies and institutions.

4.1 Synergies among policies

In terms of policies and strategies, most were geared towards individual goals. Thus, there were specific proposed policies for girls' education or access to safe water which were rather compartmentalised. No attempt has been made to identify the mutual synergies of those policies or how one policy will contribute to more than one goal. For example, if girls' education is achieved, it will also have an impact on malnutrition, as educated mothers will be more sensitive to health and nutrition concerns. Similarly, if progress is made with regard to access to safe water, it will have a positive impact on child mortality. In the post-2015 period, attempts should be made to identify a minimum optimal set of policies for achieving the MDGs. Such a set will be most effective and cost-efficient.

4.2 Integration of poverty reduction and MDG strategies

Beyond 2015, as we address the MDG issues, there has to be better integration of the poverty reduction and MDG strategies. We have to start from the premise that the MDGs are a prime subset of a larger poverty reduction agenda and as such, MDG strategies are to be part of a poverty reduction strategy.

This raises some fundamental substantive and operational issues. First, in most cases, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) have become the medium-term development plans for the countries concerned. In most of the countries, the second-generation PRSPs are being implemented. The year 2015 and beyond may represent the time-period for third or fourth-generation PRSPs. That makes the issue of PRSPs and their future a major issue. Second, in the context of the above, at an operational level, it also raises the issue of discussions with the World

Bank as to its thinking about the PRSPs and mutual collaboration with the UN system.

If PRSPs are not present, then the MDGs will have to be integrated into either national development plans or national poverty reduction strategies. This will require new thinking, new rounds of dialogues and new *modus operandi*.

4.3 Integration of policy frameworks with resource frameworks

In the post-2015 period, there will have to be proper linkages between the policy and the resource frameworks. In the context of the PRSPs, it will imply an alignment of policies and strategies with the Medium-Term Resource Framework (MTEF). It would also mean an alignment with the macroeconomic framework of the MDG strategies, which would require coordination with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

4.4 Targeted interventions

In many cases, particularly in middle-income countries, human deprivations are localised in certain regions, among specific groups – women, ethnic minority, mountain people, and rural populations. The MDG achievement in these contexts will require targeted interventions. Otherwise the MDGs may be achieved on average at the national level, with serious gaps remaining in various regions or among groups. Beyond 2015, renewed targeted efforts would need to be taken to address the pockets of deprivations. This would mean different types of need assessments, strategy formulation, implementation and monitoring and evaluation.

One issue will be MDG localisation. During the pre-2015 period, the issue of MDG localisation was part of the rhetoric, but except for a few cases, it did not materialise in most instances. Beyond 2015, this issue requires renewed efforts in terms of tailoring the MDGs to the local context, developing local level strategies, mobilising resources locally and developing local capacities and institutions.

4.5 Provision of addressing shocks

As we have witnessed in recent times, shocks and crises – whether natural calamities or economic or financial shocks or food and energy crises – can put adverse pressures on MDG progress and can even put countries which have been on-track, off-track. In the post-2015 period, MDG policies

and strategies will need adequate measures to deal with new shocks, in terms of keeping countries on track, and also to address the concerns of the vulnerable in terms of social protection and other safety nets.

5 Resources, institutions and coordination

In the pre-2015 period, resources have constituted a major constraint to MDG achievement in a number of countries. In many cases, the whole exercise was dependent on external resource support. It should also be noted that as the MDGs represent a compact between the developing and the developed world, there has been a strong expectation from developing countries that adequate resources would flow from the developed countries either in the form of official development assistance (ODA), debt-relief, foreign direct investments (FDI) and portfolio investments. Since the latter two have gone mostly to middle-income countries, for poor countries, ODA and debt-relief (in the case of highly indebted countries) have been the main source of financing for the MDGs.

However, with the financial and economic crisis and the global downturn, ODA is expected to be reduced and both FDI and portfolio investments may leave developing countries in significant amounts. In such cases, resources for the MDGs will be tight and if the global recession is prolonged and deep (in the worst-case scenario), it will have serious impacts on financing for the MDGs.

5.1 Advocacy for resources for the MDGs

During the remaining period of 2010–15 and beyond 2015, we must continue advocacy for maintaining adequate resource-provisioning for the MDGs. We should make the point quite strongly that financial and economic crises should not be used as an excuse for cutting ODA, rather such crises strengthen the case for devoting more resources to the MDGs. If we fail collectively in steering the world towards the MDGs achievement, then the current financial and economic crises may turn into a political and social crises and the price that we will have to pay for such a catastrophe will be quite high. Similarly, our failure to address the issues of human poverty by not devoting enough resources to it will create future human insecurity, human deprivation and inequality. It is, therefore, for our own extended self-interest that we should not take our eyes off the MDGs.

5.2 Revisiting ODA

In the context of the MDGs and ODA, it is important to distinguish between three gaps: the *delivery gap*: that between global commitments and their actual delivery; the *coverage gap*: that between the actual delivery on global commitments and the distribution of actual receipts across countries; and the *MDG 8 needs gap*: that between actual delivery on global commitments and estimated need for support by developing countries. The Secretary-General's MDG Gap Task Force on MDG 8 prepared the report (2008) on 'the delivery gap'. In subsequent years, the other two gaps will also be addressed. For the post-2015 period, the recommendations of the MDG Gap Task Force Report need to be followed up in order to address the resource needs of the poorest countries.

5.3 Resource envelopes

While focusing on resources for the MDGs, one should look at the total resource envelope and not only at ODA or external financing. Domestic resources are a major component of the resource envelope for the MDGs. In many developing countries, there is fiscal space that can be used for generating more resources. The tax base can be broadened, the tax rate can be made more progressive and tax administration can be made more efficient. Scope for expenditure reallocation is there, for example high defence expenditures can be reduced in many countries and more resources can be allocated to basic social services. Efficiency in resource use will also reduce resource leakages and would result in more resources. In the context of the above, private savings in many developing countries need to be looked at. In many instances, they are low and through proper incentive mechanisms, they can be increased so that they become a potential source for MDG financing.

5.4 Beyond financial resources

As we pass beyond 2015, there needs to be more emphasis on issues like open market opportunities, free trade and intellectual property rights. These are in the context of MDG 8, and they will create both direct and indirect resource space for achievement of the MDGs. The issue will be how this space will be linked to the resource needs for achieving the other MDGs. For example, with open markets, if foreign exchange earnings go up, that may provide direct resources for addressing income poverty and hunger. With

intellectual property rights, countries can produce/buy generic drugs and that may release resources for alternative uses.

5.5 Institutional support and coordination

Institutions are an integral part of MDG achievement (Jahan 2003c). Experiences have shown that in many instances, proper and adequate institutions did not exist to provide necessary leadership and to undertake implementation of the MDGs. This has happened in spite of resources. In the post-2015 period, identification of proper and adequate institutions and developing capacities of such institutions will be critical.

The MDGs are, by nature, sectoral, but they also reflect an overall perspective. In the past, the lead on the MDGs have been taken at the country level by ministries of finance and planning, without adequate voice and role for such sectoral ministries as health (crucial for the mortality goals) and agriculture (critical for the income poverty and hunger goals). In the post-2015 period, this trend needs to be changed and all the relevant ministries need to be brought together.

In the post-2015 period, both internal and external coordination will have to be strengthened. Domestically, this would mean coordination among various government ministries and departments, other local stakeholders and externally, it would mean better coordination among UN agencies, Bretton Woods Institutions and bilateral donors.

6 Monitoring progress and gaps and reporting

During the five years (2000–05) following the Millennium Summit in 2005, there have been a series of activities at the global, regional and country levels monitoring MDG progress and assessing gaps, with 1990 as the baseline. Several MDG global, regional and country reports were produced. While the global and regional reports focused on global and regional trends, the country reports assessed country progress and gaps. This monitoring exercise slowed down after 2005 but monitoring will again be a major issue during the 2010 review and thereafter.

Three points are pertinent in these respects. First, with regard to MDG monitoring and reporting, there were clear divisions of

responsibilities in terms of leading and coordinating global, regional and country MDG Reports. Second, the MDG Country Reports, which were of variable quality, were intended to be advocacy documents, rather than analytical pieces. In many instances, given the existence of National Human Development Reports (NHDRs), which are more analytical documents, a substantive and operational tension was created in many countries. Third, even though some of the MDG Country Reports attempted to present disaggregated MDG progress, most of them did not. Thus in most cases, the unevenness of progress within a country and the existence of pockets of deprivations were not unmasked.

Building on the lessons learned, monitoring MDG progress and gaps beyond 2015, will have to take a new direction. Part of the direction will depend on the set of goals and target issue, described earlier, but part of it will also depend on where we want to go.

6.1 Monitoring and assessment framework

Most of the MDG monitoring and assessments so far have used *ad hoc* frameworks as different stakeholders deem different frameworks to be relevant. The frameworks in terms of baselines and assessment methods have been different at various levels. The end result has been that comparisons among assessments and across time have been quite difficult even within a country. In the post-2015 period, we need to develop a more harmonised monitoring and assessment framework. This does not mean that we should not contextualise it in a given condition; rather it simply means that certain generic principles and guidelines should be developed so that comparisons and conclusions can be more meaningfully made.

6.2 Alignment of data series

One of the major issues with regard to MDG monitoring and reporting is the absence of a consistent series of data. The problem has three faces – first, discrepancy in numbers from different statistical sources for the same indicator for the same year; second, differences between national data and internationally standardised data published by various UN agencies and international organisations; and third, even within a country, there is discrepancy between data coming from the national statistical office, the central bank, the planning commission and

various sectoral ministries. As we go beyond 2015, efforts should be made to ensure the required consistency and alignment. The UN system at the country level can take a lead as countries are the primary source of all data.

6.3 Disaggregation of data

Monitoring MDG progress and gaps can be much more meaningful if data are disaggregated along gender, ethnic and racial lines, rural–urban divide and regional differences. With this kind of approach, MDG progress and gaps can be unmasked so that we know better where pockets of deprivations are and where targeted interventions are needed. This would also include inequality (relative poverty) and disparity dimensions, which are critical development challenges in many countries and societies, including middle-income ones. In the post-2015 period, a disaggregated approach needs to be pursued.

6.4 Statistical capacity development

Monitoring and reporting critically hinges on good quality data series, based on which trend analysis can be made. This requires on the one hand, a push on the supply side, through enhancing capacities of data collecting entities. But on the other hand, it also needs, via statistical literacy, awareness-building among policymakers about the power of numbers. Building on what we have achieved so far in these areas, a big push is needed in the post-2015 period on capacity development in data gathering, mobilisation of statistics and dissemination, and on public and policy advocacy for the use of data for advocacy and policymaking.

6.5 MDG Country Reports and the National Human Development Report

The first generation of the Country MDG Reports were advocacy documents which highlighted MDG progress and gaps in country contexts. They did not go into either diagnosing the determinants of progress or of gaps, nor proposed policy options to overcome the challenges. In that sense, such reports were not analytical pieces.

There is, at the country level, an analytical instrument, the NHDR. In the post-2015 era, in order to bring advocacy with analysis, there are two options: keeping the advocacy part in the country NHDRs and complementing them with analysis and policy options in the NHDRs; or

making country MDG Reports more substantively analytical. There are also institutional issues, for example the country MDG Reports are coordinated by the UN Country Team, while an NHDR is coordinated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). As both monitoring and implementation are important in the context of the MDGs, it is essential that we address these issues seriously.

7 Moving forward

As we move towards 2015, there are several goals, targets, policies, strategies and resources that we can start working on. The list below captures some of these measures, and it is of course not exhaustive – as we move forward, there will be new challenges and issues that will have to be addressed.

The 2010 MDG review opportunity could be used to:

- Assess MDG progress and gaps, taking into account recent crises: food price volatility, the energy crisis, the financial and economic crisis
- Review what has worked and what has not in terms of policies and strategies, processes and coordination
- Evaluate global support.

Notes

* Opinions expressed in this article are those of the author's own and in no way do they represent the views of the organisations that he serves.

Based on the 2010 MDG review, the issues for beyond 2015 should include:

- A dialogue on goals and targets as well as monitoring and reporting frameworks
- A discussion on innovative policies and strategies, including those that can help countries remain on track during shocks and vulnerabilities and aligning those with the MDGs
- A dialogue on the resource envelope.

Finally, we need to identify for the post-2015 period:

- Coherence mechanisms for the UN system in moving forward the MDG agenda and working globally and at country level
- A concrete collaboration mechanism with the Bretton Woods Institutions
- A road map for MDG achievement beyond 2015.

All of these require discussion within and among development partners, making use of all available fora and modalities, and the creation and use of new space for consensus building.

1 Section 2 of this article has benefited from a note by Jan Vandemoortele and from informal discussions with him.

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