

IDS RESEARCH SUMMARY

Research findings at a glance from the
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Global poverty reduction to 2015 and beyond: What has been the impact of the MDGs and what are the options for a post-2015 global framework?

What will replace the MDGs after 2015? Many people have been wary of asking this question publicly, concerned it might divert attention away from achieving the MDGs by 2015. However, if there is to be a post-2015 framework based on a global discussion, that discussion needs to start now.

This paper assesses the impact of the MDGs on poverty reduction to date. It does this by reviewing the impact on the international poverty discourse, on policy at the country level, and on outcomes. The paper also examines the key issues that are likely to shape development over the next couple of decades including the economic crisis and its aftermath, climate change and adaptation, and demographic changes. The paper then asks what a post-2015 global framework might look like. The authors urge that a global discussion, ideally led by an independent global commission and a 'Voices of the Poor in the 21st Century', start as soon as possible.

Assessing the impacts of the MDGs

The MDG approach has been defined as 'human development meets results-based management'. It consists of a set of indicators for guiding poverty reduction and for holding donors and country governments accountable to citizens.

Recent analyses of the impact of the MDGs paint a complex picture. In terms of influencing the development discourse itself, the impact of the MDGs has been strong. But impacts at the country level – in terms of donors' statements and national development strategies such as poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) – have been mixed. Progress on poverty reduction across developing countries during the MDG period has also been mixed.

Emerging issues shaping development

The MDGs were conceived in an era of relative stability, strong economic growth and resilient aid budgets. We now live in a very different world. Any post-2015 framework will need to fit into the current context of multiple and interlinked crises, stressors and uncertainties which could have potentially large adverse impacts on poverty. Not only the global economic crisis and the post-crisis fiscal squeeze, but also issues such as climate change, demographic shifts, energy prices and

urbanisation. The economic crisis has also triggered a loss of confidence in the economic orthodoxy of the pre-crisis era as well as the emergence of new power balances in global governance.

New approaches to poverty reduction

Current and upcoming global challenges present an opportunity to rethink approaches to poverty reduction, indicators and institutional arrangements. There is currently a range of initiatives reviewing poverty and development indicators. An important emerging theme is the need for greater emphasis on the qualitative, social and psychological aspects of human wellbeing. At the same time, the landscape and nature of aid is also changing.

“The impact of the MDGs at a country level is uneven”

“ A post-2015 framework would need to give greater weight to poor people’s own concerns ”

Key findings of the research include:

- The impact of the MDGs at a country level is uneven at best.
- The MDGs may have had some distorting impacts, such as targeting the near poor (who are easier to help) rather than the most poor.
- In many of the least developed countries and sub-Saharan Africa poverty reduction has been faster in the MDG period (whereas evidence of acceleration across all developing countries is less positive).
- The costs of adaptation to climate change will represent a huge challenge for any post-2015 framework.
- As will the addition of an extra 760 million people to the world’s population over the next ten years.
- The shifting global distribution of poverty – with three-quarters of the world’s poor now living in middle-income countries – a ‘new bottom billion’ will also have an impact.

What next?

The paper presents three possible options for a post-2015 global framework. First, a ‘MDGs 2020/2025’ which involves using the same goals, possibly with a few changes to indicators, and a new timeline. Second, a ‘MDG-plus’ which expands the MDG approach to local ownership and nationally-set goals. Third, a ‘One World’ approach which builds on MDG8 around addressing global issues such as climate change.

The authors argue that a combination of these options might be best: retaining a core set of MDGs, setting new global goals with regional sub-goals that could be translated into national goals, and agreeing some ‘One World’ indicators.

Achieving a new international consensus on a post-2015 framework is likely to be a lengthy process. It is not only a question of choosing which indicators and targets to focus on, but also deciding which process to adopt to produce them.

The authors conclude that a post-2015 framework would need to:

- Pay greater attention to emerging issues such as climate change and demographic changes.
- Update thinking on indicators and institutions, giving greater weight to poor people’s own concerns.
- Have better Southern ownership which should lead to integration into national development strategies.

This could be achieved by:

- Setting up an independent global commission led by someone like Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.
- Engaging in a truly global and participatory discussion through a series of roundtables, public events and research activities.

Credits

Andy Sumner and Meera Tiwari, ‘Global Poverty Reduction to 2015 and Beyond: What has Been the Impact of the MDGs and What are the Options for a Post-2015 Global Framework?’, Research Summary of Working Paper 348, October 2010

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