Introduction

The strength and significance of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) comes in large part from the way that they focused international attention on poverty and enhanced coordinated international action. Achieving international agreement on the next development agenda will be critical to meeting the challenge that will remain beyond 2015. It will require a balance between ambition and political feasibility. This paper contributes to the discussion of the global architecture needed for a post-2015 agenda and seeks to balance the need to gain consensus amongst nations with the desire to reflect the lessons of the MDGs and ensure that we reach the most vulnerable people.

World Vision supports an enhanced set of global goals that build on the current MDG priorities and that maintain the global momentum to finish the challenge set out in the original MDGs. World Vision’s work in over 80 countries has also demonstrated the need to include a process for establishing national and sub-national targets to ensure that the next development agenda reaches the most vulnerable, enhances governance and accountability at the national level and better reflects local context.

The proposal for simple, clear and measurable global goals, combined with a process to establish national and sub-national targets, also provides scope for diverse views and approaches to development among nations that will be necessary to reach agreement on a post-2015 development agenda in the current political environment.
that the current MDGs are strong on common international targets but weak on country- or sub-national-level interpretation of those targets. The focus on global aggregates and ‘one-size-fits-all’ global targets allowed states around the world to meet their MDG targets without addressing the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable.

Professor Deepak Nayyar (adviser to the United Nations Task Force on the post-2015 Development agenda) identifies the problems with aggregated global goals in his report to the UN Task Force on the Post-2015 development agenda:

**The MDGs are set out in terms of aggregates or averages which often conceal as much as they reveal because there is no reference to distributional outcomes.** The depiction of social indicators of development as arithmetic means or statistical averages provides a single summary measure but it cannot reflect the well-being of the poor, most of whom are significantly below any line that is drawn on the basis of an average. Therefore, a meaningful assessment of progress in the living conditions of people must recognise rather than ignore the existence of inequality. The ‘tyranny of averages’ can be deceptive, if not misleading. It is essential to disaggregate outcomes so as to reveal rather than conceal distributional realities.  

A post-2015 architecture for development must address these issues by ensuring that the development agenda includes global goals which continue to reflect international priorities for development and maintain the global effort but which also require policies and programmes to be directed towards the most vulnerable through national and sub-national targets.  

### The current political environment

The international political environment in which the post-2015 agenda will be set is vastly different from the relatively positive context that gave shape to the MDGs. Western economies continue to run record deficits in the wake of the global financial crisis and are increasingly focused on domestic issues. Projections on aid flows are expected to decline in the immediate future. A UNICEF review of the budgets of 126 low-income countries for 2010–11 found that just under half were cutting public expenditure by 6.9 per cent, with likely follow-on effects for health and education budgets. On issues as diverse as climate change and solving the European debt crisis, the ability to generate answers to shared global problems appears to be diminishing.

Further, the MDGs were the product of ten years of consensus building, whereas the intention is that any development agenda beyond 2015 will be concluded in two years. This time frame seriously jeopardises the likelihood of reaching global agreement on the agenda. Building on the existing MDG framework will be crucial to gaining international agreement, and existing efforts should not be discouraged or lost. The MDGs are central to many national government development plans. Parliamentary or implementation committees focused on delivering the MDGs domestically have been established in countries such as Mongolia, Bangladesh, Sierra Leone and Kyrgyzstan. Brazil and Nepal have incorporated MDG outcomes explicitly in their national planning priorities. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) found that ‘of the 30 countries surveyed, each had some form of national process or institutional framework in place that was concerned with formulating, implementing and/or monitoring programmes and policies in support of MDG achievements.’

World Vision’s approach to the post-2015 discussions reflects both the need to achieve a renewed global commitment to the world’s poor and most vulnerable people, and the need to provide a politically feasible architecture for development post-2015.

### Retaining clear, measurable and simple global goals

Despite significant achievements, many of the challenges identified in the MDGs remain unmet. Millions of people, including children, continue to face hunger and limited access to child and maternal health, among other key needs. The post-2015 development agenda must continue to focus on the original priorities and ensure that the challenge is met. World Vision remains focused on its own contribution to ‘finishing the job’ – particularly for MDGs 4 and 5 (reducing child mortality and improving maternal health) which are so critical to improving the lives of the most vulnerable children.

The foundation of any post-2015 development agenda must be an international agreement to a set of global goals to alleviate poverty, and in most cases this will be possible through enhancements to the MDGs. In particular it is important that the post-2015 discussion focuses on maintaining a clear, measurable and simple set of global goals beyond 2015.

- They must be clear so as to inspire again the public’s interest and set out an agenda upon which countries, donors, other agencies and citizens can focus.
- They must build on the current MDGs by retaining measurable goals that ensure efforts are effective and for which all governments can be held accountable.
• They must be kept simple, identifying global goals with which no one can disagree, in order to reach an international consensus. Enhancing the priorities currently contained in the MDGs is arguably the best way to achieve this.

The basic principles of clear, measurable and simple goals seek to retain the strengths of the original MDGs whilst also reflecting the above-mentioned political and economic realities that will constrain the achievement of a more ambitious agenda beyond 2015. World Vision is pleased that similar principles have guided the UN System Task Team, as Nayyar notes:

In retrospect, it is clear that the MDGs, much like the Human Development Index, caught the popular imagination. The reasons are almost obvious – a simplicity that is engaging, targets that are quantitative, objectives that are easy to comprehend, and good intentions with which no one could possibly disagree.4 These qualities should underlie and inform the advocacy efforts of all stakeholders in the post-2015 discussions if the critical outcome of an international agreement is to be achieved.

Building global goals with national and sub-national targets

Some of the crucial lessons from the MDGs include the need for clearer accountabilities and a greater focus on context at the national and sub-national levels. There is also a need for collective responses to those development challenges that stretch beyond national borders: issues such as inequality, food security, migration and climate change. The post-2015 development agenda needs to reach the most vulnerable, address growing inequalities and strengthen national and sub-national governance.

By including a process for the development of national and sub-national targets in the post-2015 development agenda, World Vision hopes to shine a light on inequality within countries and regions, as well as strengthen governance and accountabilities at the national level. National governments would not only have the opportunity to determine and report on their own plans and achievements towards reaching the global goals but would also have a clear accountability to their citizens to contribute to internationally agreed goals. Incorporating greater governance and accountability at the national level into the post-2015 development agenda is crucial to meeting the development challenges that remain beyond 2015.

We are by no means alone in this proposal. The Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) and the International Federation of Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), for example, have stated that there should be definite global goals and consistent measurement of local and regional targets, but targets should be set nationally and sub-nationally. They further argue that by setting global minimum standards which all countries could achieve, the next development framework would recognise ‘that poverty is a ubiquitous problem’.5

Opportunity to reflect context

The proposal for global goals with national and sub-national targets recognises that the current generation of MDGs were largely driven from the North and were the domain of a small set of experts. This proposal shifts the development of clear targets to national governments and regions, providing greater opportunity for every government to design and determine its own best approach to achieving the overall goals, based on its country’s particular circumstances, economy and needs.

Incorporating national and sub-national targets is also important for addressing the particular needs of fragile states. For the world’s most fragile and conflict-affected states, the MDGs failed to respond both to the extent of their poverty reduction challenge and to the very different nature of that challenge in those contexts. By incorporating national and sub-national targets into the post-2015 development agenda, the process will allow greater scope and focus on the particular development needs of these nations, none of which will achieve a single MDG by 2015.
**National targets to strengthen national governance**

Governance is fundamental to the rights and well-being of all people. It is the means by which the state’s responsibilities as duty bearer for ensuring human rights are realised. It embodies the ‘rules by which a society decided how resources should be distributed’.6

For World Vision, effective governance is far more than the existence and efficiency of government institutions, regulatory frameworks and incentives to ensure economic development. Effectiveness lies in the quality of the relationship between the state, society and the private sector, and is demonstrated in changes in the well-being of the most vulnerable communities – particularly their children. Importantly, the inclusion of national and sub-national targets will be one way to incorporate greater accountability into the post-2015 development agenda, requiring governments to set out their plans and means to deliver outcomes for their citizens.

The central role of governance is recognised by the UN Task Team on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, which identifies ‘good governance practices based on the rule of law as an enabler for the realisation of the “future we want for all”’.7 It also notes that ‘experience to date with the MDGs has shown that, in many cases, sustained progress towards the MDGs has been underpinned by good governance and women’s empowerment, and hampered by their absence.’8 In observing that merely mentioning principles (like governance) without the means for measurement leads to them not being prioritised for action, the UN Task Team makes a case for addressing governance either directly with indicators or through greater accountability through nationally set targets. The 2002 Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative is a good example of globally developed standards on transparency9 that are implemented at national level, while the New Deal for Fragile States is in the process of doing the same for the world’s most fragile contexts.

**A step towards greater universality**

The MDGs targeted the developing – or low-income – world for action, with only one goal focused on high-income countries. The growing call for greater universality, or shared goals, would involve a different kind of commitment to development from high-income countries beyond their traditional role of donor, to include domestic reforms on, say, consumption or environmental sustainability.

World Vision’s own vision for fullness of life for every child, whether in rich or poorer countries, compels us to call for universally applied goals. Elsewhere10 we have drawn attention to the emerging reality that the majority of the poor now live in middle-income countries. The incorporation of a process whereby nations develop contextualised targets and commitments to achieving the globally agreed goals means that all nations (high-, middle- or low-income) have the opportunity to report on their own efforts and contribution to achieving the next set of goals both domestically and internationally.

The creation of shared global goals with common and differentiated responsibility in the post-2015 agenda would recognise and reflect not only changing global demographics, such as the growth of middle-income countries, but also their growing role as donors. This would also allow countries to be held accountable for delivering the elements of shared global goals, such as poverty reduction and sustainable consumption.

**National targets on financial sources beyond donors**

Despite significant policy calls and discussion amongst civil society, UN agencies and other stakeholders on what a post-2015 framework should look like, there has been less discussion of development finance. The absence of financial commitments or assessments of cost for further development in the current discussion of a post-2015 agenda is cause for all stakeholders to reflect.

Only a handful of countries11 reached the target for official development assistance of 0.7 per cent of gross national income, despite the fact that agreement to do so was reached in 2002. Instead, aid budgets in a number of donor countries have been cut. The global economic outlook remains uncertain, with the likelihood of further cuts by donor countries.

Incorporating national and sub-national targets into the post-2015 development framework may help with addressing alternative sources of finance for development, be they private funds, foreign direct investment or other sources. As Nayyar notes, *There is a misuse in so far as the MDGs have come to be captured by a donor-centric view of development. This has led to a disproportionate emphasis on the importance of external financing in the pursuit of MDGs. It has also tended to shift the focus of attention away from national governments to the international community. But success or failure in the pursuit of MDGs depends largely upon what happens within countries, where governments are both responsible and accountable for outcomes.*12
Whilst the need for ongoing and significant financial support by donors will remain beyond 2015, increasing and improving the domestic revenue base of low-income countries will be critical to meeting the challenge of alleviating poverty. The incorporation of national and sub-national targets into the post-2015 development agenda could support this necessary transition, as country ownership of targets is likely to be far greater.

**Conclusion**

We must retain the global momentum already achieved by the MDGs by ensuring that a global agreement is reached but also by ensuring that the next agenda reflects the lessons of the past decade, with scope for nations to develop contextualised national and sub-national targets. This will improve the likelihood of agreement on a post-2015 development agenda – something we not only want to see but also need if we are to meet the outstanding challenge to reduce global poverty.

There is growing concern that the current economic environment and changing global geo-politics will make such an agreement difficult to achieve. World Vision’s proposal for a set of global goals with the addition of national and sub-national targets provides scope for different approaches at the country level and differing levels of ambition where national priorities differ. This will be critical to achieving consensus to a post-2015 development agenda given the limited evidence to date of the necessary political will to deliver a more ambitious global set of goals.

The proposal for a set of simple, clear and measurable global goals combined with a process to develop national and sub-national targets reflects the policy lessons of the MDGs as well as the current political reality.

**Recommendations**

World Vision calls on national governments, donors and international institutions to work together to deliver an enhanced development agenda beyond 2015 that includes:

- a renewed commitment to alleviate poverty beyond 2015 with a set of clear, measurable and simple global goals that reflect and enhance the priorities and challenges that were made in the original MDGs
- a process to establish national and sub-national targets that will ensure that the post-2015 framework reaches the most vulnerable communities, enhances governance, reduces dependence on traditional donor funding and reflects local development needs and priorities.

© World Vision International 2012
CONTACTS:

World Vision Lead contact on Post-2015 agenda:
Chris Derksen-Hiebert
Director, External Relations, Advocacy and Justice for Children
chris_derksen-hiebert@worldvision.ca

Post-2015 Policy Briefs series editor:
Kate Laburn Peart
Director, Public Policy, Advocacy and Justice for Children

World Vision International
Global Executive Office
1 Roundwood Avenue, Stockley Park
Uxbridge, Middlesex UB11 1FG
United Kingdom
+44.20.7758.2900

World Vision International
Advocacy and Justice for Children
World Vision House
Opal Drive, Fox Mline
Milton Keynes MK15 0ZR
United Kingdom
+44.1908.841.063

World Vision International
Liaison Office
7-9 chemin de Balexert
Case Postale 545
CH-1219 Châtelaine
Switzerland
+41.22.798.4183

World Vision International
United Nations Liaison Office
919 2nd Avenue, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10017
USA
+1.212.355.1779

World Vision Brussels &
EU Representation ivzw
18, Square de Meeûs
1st Floor, Box 2
B-1050 Brussels
Belgium
+32.2.230.1621

www.wvi.org

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation
dedicated to working with children, families and communities to
overcome poverty and injustice. World Vision serves all people, regardless of
religion, race, ethnicity or gender.