
From Declaration to Delivery

Actioning the Post-2015 Agenda

We must see action to inspire action

“At the SDG Summit in September, leaders must not only announce the new goals, but make concrete and convincing commitments for how they will deliver them at national and international levels.”

This synthesis report has been prepared by an independent expert (David Steven, Senior Fellow at NYU's Center on International Cooperation), based on the outcomes of a series of dialogues on national implementation of the post-2015 development agenda, supported by Save the Children and partners.

It reflects the views expressed at the workshops, but does not represent the position of any national government or other institution. Overarching conclusions are based on a comparative analysis of the findings from all roundtables and are presented to stimulate further debate and discussion on delivery of the SDGs.

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Key Findings

This synthesis report is based on a series of ‘reality check’ roundtables that explored the challenges of delivering the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets that will replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2016.

The objective was to ground the SDGs conversation in national reality, engaging senior decision-makers in capitals with the implications of implementing the agenda, while ensuring the negotiations in New York are better informed by national realities. **The initiative has been supported by Save the Children and partners and the report has been prepared by an independent expert.**

Recognising that governments are ultimately responsible for the design and delivery of national development plans, and the integration and implementation of the SDGs, the roundtables had governments at their heart, although other stakeholders were represented at many of the events. The following governments participated: Colombia, Denmark, Ghana, Guatemala, Mexico, Pakistan, Peru and Tanzania.

1. The roundtables concluded that the MDGs had helped to improve national planning and ensure a greater focus on development priorities, but that delivery in developing countries had sometimes been impeded by a lack of human, financial, and technological capacity.

2. There is general enthusiasm for the potential of the post-2015 agenda to enrich national policy and strengthen national development plans. However, this is combined with genuine concern about the breadth and ambition of the new agenda, especially for countries with limited capacity, and given the risk that countries will “pick and choose the easiest elements.”

3. Participants in all countries agree that the sustainable development agenda will only succeed if it is integrated into national planning and translated into policy at national levels. Plans must be strengthened where necessary in response to the new goals, while all countries recognise the challenge and critical link between planning at national and subnational levels.

4. Delivery of the post-2015 agenda will be impossible without cross-government mechanisms and dynamic country-wide partnerships for sustainable development. Consultation must not be a cosmetic process, but a genuine attempt to ensure all stakeholders play an active role in delivery.

5. The Financing for Development conference in Addis Ababa is seen as providing an important opportunity to reform the international economic, financial and tax systems in ways that would support post-2015 delivery. Some countries are working on priorities that resonate with the agenda for Addis, such as establishing a minimum social floor.

6. Data is seen as fundamental to delivery, but it is important to avoid the prospect of “greater investment in measuring targets than in implementing them.” Retrospective accountability is not enough. Policymakers need timely information that will allow for better decision-making.

Eight themes, drawn from the roundtables, illustrate the scale of the delivery challenge;

Reality Check #1

We must see action to inspire action

At the SDG Summit in September, leaders must not only announce the new goals, but make concrete and convincing commitments for how they will deliver them at national and international levels.

Reality Check #2

Delay will be costly for the new agenda

On 1st January 2016, the deadline for meeting the SDGs will be only slightly more than 5,000 days away. If delivery is not well underway in the early years of the new agenda, many of the targets will be already out of reach. We must learn from the MDG process and cut the time lag between adoption and action.

Reality Check #3

We are not yet ready to deliver

The policy, strategic, financing and operational challenges of the new agenda are significant. All stakeholders must engage with the reality of translating global goals to national level and redouble their preparations to deliver in 2016.

Reality Check #4

We shouldn't be afraid of priorities

Countries must decide where they plan to start, in order to provide a foundation for accelerated delivery of the agenda as a whole in the 2020s.

Reality Check #5

We must be prepared to tackle the toughest challenges

Countries must identify where they need to go further than envisaged in their current development plans to move beyond business-as-usual trajectories. If we are to leave no-one behind, for example, then we need dramatic changes in the way we reach the most vulnerable and marginalised people.

Reality Check #6

We need to think for the long, medium and short term

Countries need to plan for three time horizons; a vision for 2030, an action plan for 2020, and a roadmap to bring together all stakeholders around immediate delivery priorities.

Reality Check #7

We must quickly go beyond the last generation of global goals

The MDGs provide a basis for implementation, and we must commit to finish the job they started, but the new agenda is broader, has a greater focus on equity, and requires developed countries to make an early commitment to domestic delivery.

Reality Check #8

The international system must help countries to deliver

Effective delivery will only be possible with investment, guidance and mechanisms to allow countries, and stakeholders from all sectors to work together to design collective responses to shared challenges.

The report makes four recommendations for further discussions and debate:

- **Build an informal network of centres of excellence for post-2015 implementation**, bringing together best practice in areas such as data, policy development, planning, costing and financing, and coalition building.
- **Engage decision makers from across government in the delivery debate**, with a view to forming inter-ministerial coordination groups (as demonstrated by some countries represented at the roundtables), with a particular focus on Ministers of Finance and/or of Planning, who should play a pivotal role in preparation for the FfD and SDG Summits.
- **Announce ‘quick start’ packages of financing and other support for resonant delivery priorities (at the FfD Conference and SDG Summit)** that will demonstrate how countries plan to make a significant and immediate difference to people’s lives, or to support more sustainable patterns of development in the future.
- **Position the High Level Political Forum in 2017 as the ‘Delivery Summit’ for the post-2015 agenda**, setting an expectation that governments will showcase progress and learning from initial implementation and identify how collective efforts can put the world on track to fulfil the SDGs by 2030.

“Countries must identify where they need to go further than envisaged in their current development plans to move beyond business-as-usual trajectories. If we are to leave no-one behind, for example, then we need dramatic changes in the way we reach the most vulnerable and marginalised people.”

01

The Reality Check Roundtables

Beyond the MDGs

In September 2015, the world's leaders will meet in New York to agree a new development agenda to replace the Millennium Development Goals.

The MDGs have been described by the UN Secretary-General as “the greatest anti-poverty push in history,”¹ but have also been criticised for having been developed by a small group of experts and imposed without consultation. In contrast, the new Sustainable Development Goals have been developed through a process that “has remained open to all governments and embraced the voice of civil society, including the business community, academia and United Nations Organizations.”²

17 SDGs and 169 targets have been proposed, most of which are to be achieved by 2030 (a few targets have an earlier deadline). They were developed in response to a decision by governments at the Rio+20 Conference that a new set of goals were needed to focus global attention on “priority areas for achievement of sustainable development,” combined with a renewed commitment to “freeing humanity from poverty and hunger as a matter of urgency.”³

While some improvements to the targets are still being discussed, any significant changes are now considered unlikely. The focus has therefore begun to switch towards how the goals can be financed and implemented. This delivery challenge is of a scale that dwarfs the MDGs.

The new agenda is:

- **Comprehensive**, covering the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, and the interactions between these dimensions.

- **Universal** – goals have been set for 7 billion people, not just those living in the poorest countries, with governments encouraged to set their own national targets “guided by the global level of ambition but taking into account national circumstances.”⁴
- **Ambitious** – most of the targets require unprecedented improvements in human welfare, and in the protection of the environmental needs of present and future generations.⁵

Delivering the SDGs

The new agenda will only succeed if it mobilises a dynamic partnership that draws on the strengths of governments, the private sector, civil society, and international organisations, and is capable of driving transformative change at global, regional, national, subnational and local levels. International negotiations are the preserve of diplomats, which makes it essential that the post-2015 debate is now broadened to those who will be responsible for implementing in country and who understand the national realities that will determine the success of the new agenda.

This report is based on a series of ‘reality check’ roundtables that were held with the participation of eight countries who have begun mobilising domestic stakeholders behind the new goals and targets.

It is one of a number of exercises that are putting delivery in the spotlight:

- UNDP is running a series of dialogues that explore issues such as capacity building, mobilising grassroots support and strengthening partnerships with civil society and the private sector, and how “participation and empowerment can improve accountability in the post-2015 agenda.”⁶

- Some countries have begun intensive consultations on the agenda or have started exploring how the new goals and targets can be integrated into their national development plans (see examples in this report), while others have been exploring how they can meet goals and targets in areas that were not covered by the MDGs (for example, see the recent report on how the UK could deliver the aspiration to end violence against children through its national and international policy).⁷
- At a global level, work is underway to develop new strategies for some of the most urgent development priorities (for example, Every Woman Every Child's work to design a global strategy for women and children's health for the post-2015 era, based on "strong country ownership [and] the highest-level and broad-based political support").⁸


The Reality Check roundtables had governments at their heart, although other stakeholders were represented at many of the events. In the Monterrey Consensus, governments agreed that "each country has primary responsibility for its own economic and social development, and the role of national policies and development strategies cannot be overemphasized."⁹ This principle remains at the heart of negotiations for the post-2015 summit and for the third Financing for Development conference in Addis Ababa in July.


National ownership provides the critical link between global aspirations on the one hand, and the impact of unsustainable patterns of development on communities on the other. National governments have the legitimacy to design and implement development strategies, and the capacity to mobilise resources to fund them.


Each roundtable took the proposed SDGs and associated targets as their starting point, showcasing the work of UN member states who have already started to think through the practicalities of implementation. They provide us with a range of perspectives from countries facing very different challenges, illustrating the reality of delivering a sustainable development agenda.


The roundtable process


The following roundtables were held:

 **Mexico** – a one and a half day workshop held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with other ministry representatives responsible for finance, planning, development, economics and the environment. This workshop had a regional scope, with high-level attendees from Colombia, Guatemala and Peru.

 **Ghana** – a one day workshop, chaired by the Director General of the National Development Planning Commission, and with participation from six government departments and agencies including Ghana Statistical Service, National Development Planning Commission, Environmental Protection Agency and from the University of Ghana.

 **Denmark** – a two-hour discussion held at the Ministry of Affairs in Copenhagen, with participants including the Danish Ambassador and Under-Secretary for Global Development and Cooperation.

 **Pakistan** – a half day workshop with representatives from the Planning Commission, and ministries responsible for finance, climate change, food security, water, power and health, as well as from the higher education sector. This event was also attended by a Member of the Parliamentary Task Force on MDGs and SDGs.

 **Tanzania** – a one day workshop with participants from the President and Prime Minister's Offices, from a number of ministries, including finance, planning, foreign affairs, health and social welfare, gender and children, agriculture and food security, and natural resources and tourism, and from the University of Dar es Salaam.

The roundtables used, or adapted, a format that was developed to assist the event's facilitators, and which aimed to ensure that participants at all roundtables:

- Reviewed the emerging post-2015 development agenda, including the proposed goals and targets, and explored lessons learned from the MDGs.
- Assessed the relevance of the SDGs to national policies, domestic resources, and development strategies.
- Identified the added value of the post-2015 development agenda for their country, and made recommendations on how to increase it.

All meetings were held under the Chatham House rule. Participants spoke freely and their comments do not represent an official position, but reflect how governments are approaching implementation as the time nears to deliver the SDGs.

This synthesis report has been prepared by an independent expert. While it reflects the outcomes from the roundtables, responsibility for the content is the responsibility of the author, not any of the governments who contributed to the events.

02

Learning from the MDGs

National profiles

The countries represented at the Reality Check roundtables are primarily those that are already demonstrating leadership in preparing to implement the post-2015 agenda, but the group also offers a good spread geographically, and in terms of demographic profile and the social, economic and environmental challenges different countries face (figure 1):

The countries fall into three broad categories:

- Ghana, Guatemala, Pakistan, and Tanzania have rapidly growing, young populations, low or medium levels of human development, large numbers of people living in absolute poverty, and make a negligible contribution to global environmental degradation. Tanzania is the youngest country and will barely age during the post-2015 era, with half of its population still below the age of 18 in 2030.
- The upper middle income countries – Colombia, Mexico and Peru – have somewhat older populations and lower rates of population growth. Their citizens have considerable unmet aspirations for development, however, with average GDP capita still far below levels enjoyed by rich countries, and the majority of their populations still living on less than \$10 per day.
- Denmark, as a European country, is older, richer, and more privileged than the other seven countries. More than half its population is over the age of 40, and its GDP per capita is almost six times higher than Mexico's and 66 times higher than Tanzania's. Denmark makes the greatest contribution to patterns of environmental unsustainability – its carbon emissions are 66% above the global average – but is currently the least vulnerable to environmental risk.

MDG progress

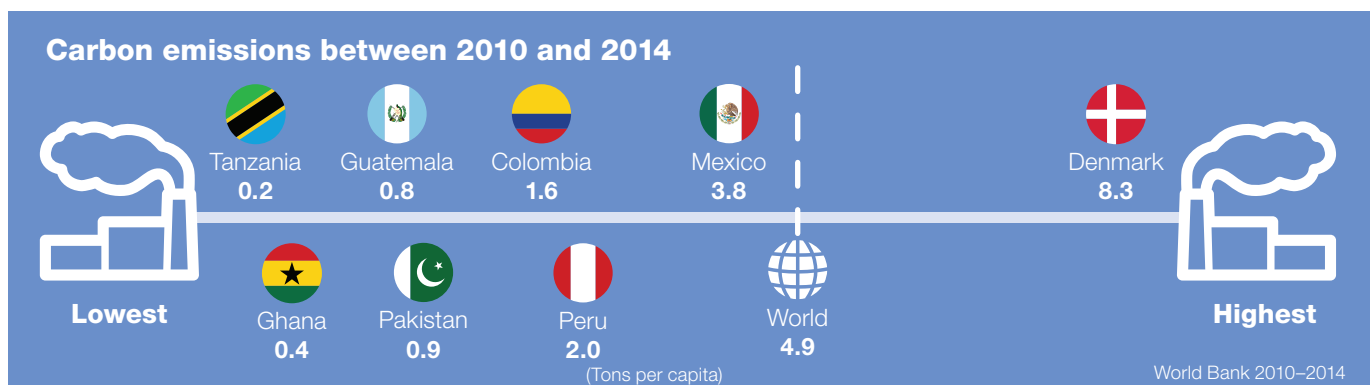
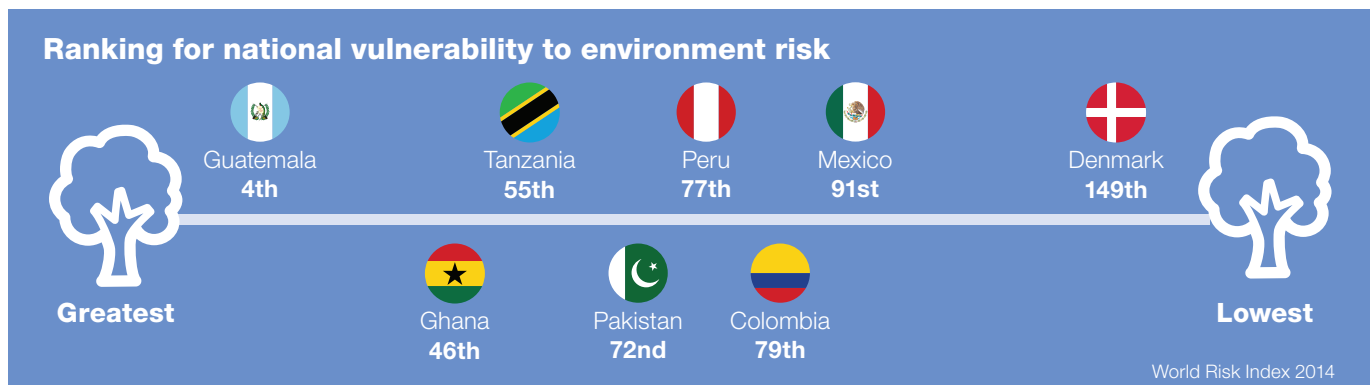
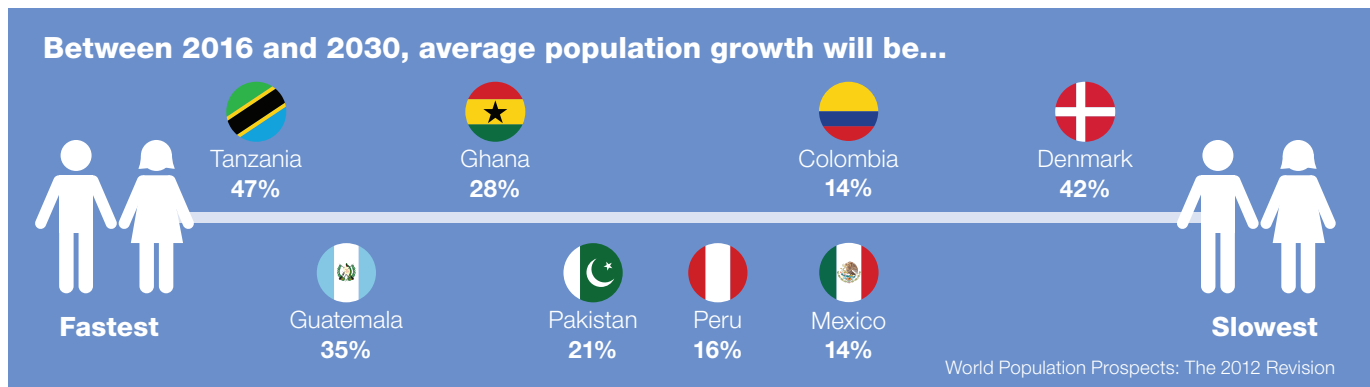
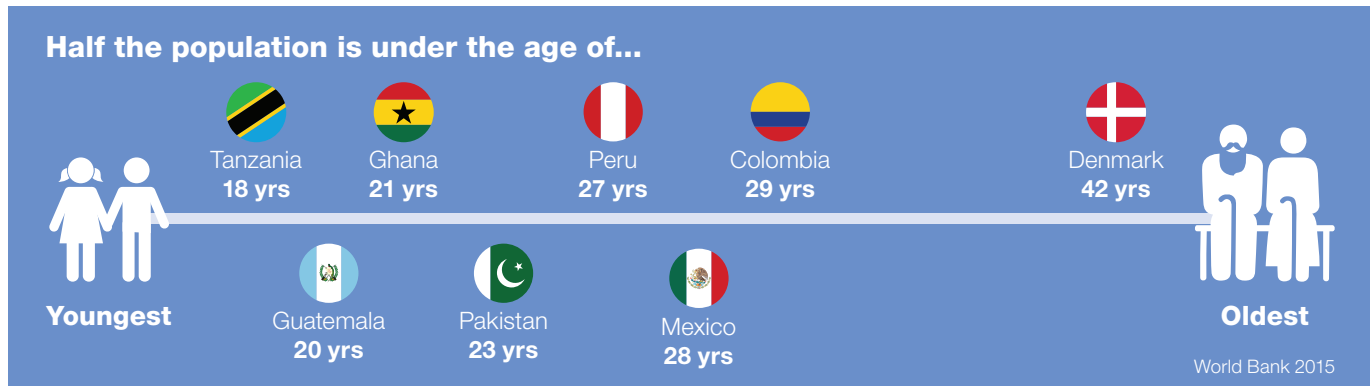
The eight countries have had very different experiences of the MDGs.

In terms of progress made, the group includes some of the strongest performers during the MDG era. Mexico expects to meet 85% of its indicators, and currently sits in third place in an index that tracks progress against the MDGs.¹⁰ Ghana is on track to halve poverty and deliver universal primary education, although it is struggling to meet child survival and maternal mortality targets.¹¹ Peru has met poverty, health and education targets ahead of schedule, but remains concerned about a lack of progress for women, and for certain ethnic and regional groups.¹²

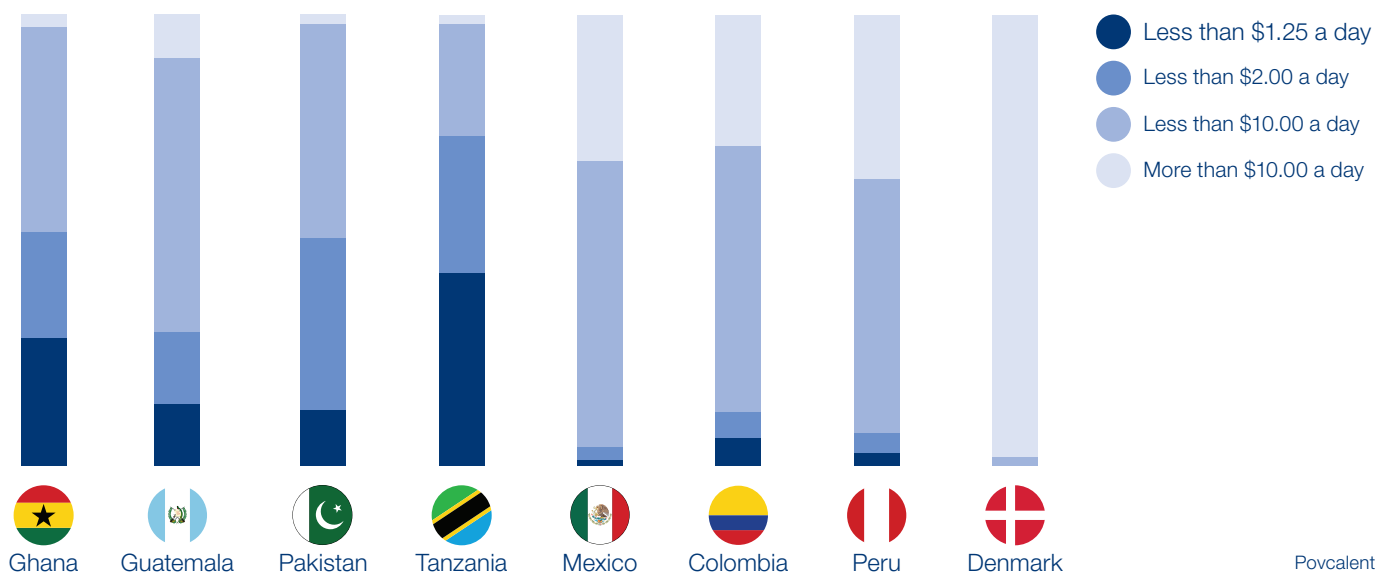
Some countries have demonstrated important progress despite daunting obstacles. Colombia has experienced a long-lasting civil conflict that is estimated to have led to 220,000 deaths (81% civilian).¹³ It took the country around five years to integrate the MDGs into national development plans,¹⁴ but it has now managed to build a partnership between government, civil society and the international community that will deliver many of the MDGs.¹⁵

Guatemala's civil war ended before the MDGs were agreed, but its development performance has been hampered by the legacy of conflict, as well as by a lack of national consensus behind the MDGs, and a lack of capacity and financing for delivery.¹⁶ Progress has accelerated in recent years, however, with a particular focus on the most deprived parts of the country and on indigenous and other marginalised groups.¹⁷

Figure one: Country snapshots



Share of population living in poverty



Pakistan is also affected by internal crisis, and is not expected to meet 70% of its MDG targets, with persistent problems in sectors such as education, health and nutrition.¹⁸ This masks significant variations between provinces, which have had considerable responsibility for MDG-related policies since devolution in 2008, with the reports on MDG progress stating that some parts of the country are struggling in the face of “unprecedented natural as well as manmade calamities” that block social and economic development.¹⁹ Recent years have seen provincial governments, which are led by different political parties, take concerted action to accelerate progress to meet social and economic priorities.

Tanzania – the poorest of the eight countries – faces the greatest development challenges, with weak data sometimes making it hard to assess the speed at which it is progressing. Absolute poverty estimates vary from over 40%²⁰ to under 30%,²¹ while recent estimates suggest the country’s GDP is more than a quarter larger than previously thought.²² While the country is unlikely to reach many of the MDGs by 2015,²³ it has experienced sustained growth over the past decade and this has begun to feed through to improved living standards, with the World Bank recently reporting that “the economic strategy implemented by the Government over the past decade may have begun to facilitate reductions in poverty.”²⁴

There is strong national ownership of the MDGs in Tanzania and – as in Pakistan at both federal and provincial levels²⁵ – an increased focus on delivery.²⁶ The Tanzanian government is:

- Considering scaling up its social safety net, providing conditional cash transfers to the poorest 4 million people in the country at a cost of 2.5% of the government’s budget, drawing on models developed in countries such as Brazil and Mexico.²⁷
- Increasing political focus on surmounting obstacles that block the country’s development, with the Presidential Delivery Bureau running the Big Results Now programme, which uses a Malaysian model to accelerate progress in agriculture, transportation, energy, water, education, and resource mobilisation, with ambitious targets for 2015.²⁸

Denmark is one of only five members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee to meet the commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI on official development assistance (ODA), with ODA currently at 0.85% and the government committed to a gradual increase to 1%.²⁹ In 2010, the Danish government adopted a new strategy that aimed to accelerate progress towards the MDGs, which set five priorities: rights, growth and employment, gender equality, support for fragile states, and protecting development gains from climate change and other environmental threats.³⁰ It has also increased the predictability of aid flows, allowing for better planning by its development partners,³¹ while aiming to spend two thirds of its ODA in Africa and to work with African governments to increase regional integration and their global voice and influence.³²

Denmark comes first in the CGD Commitment to Development Index, reflecting support for the global partnership for development (MDG8) that goes well beyond aid.³³ Its commitment to “an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system” (target 8.A) is weakened, somewhat, by relatively high agricultural subsidies.³⁴ Mexico is also an OECD member (although not part of the DAC), with the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation playing an increasingly important role in South-South and triangular cooperation. This reflects Mexico’s commitment in its national development plan to demonstrating that the country is a responsible and constructive actor on the global stage.³⁵

Reviewing the MDGs

In reviewing the impact of the MDGs, roundtable participants were generally positive, although there were also a number of criticisms:

- Most countries believe that the MDGs have helped improve national planning and ensured a greater focus on development priorities in sectors such as health, education and poverty reduction.
- In Tanzania (where ODA accounted for 10.5% of GNI in 2013) and Ghana (2.8% of GNI), there was recognition that integrating the MDGs into national visions, strategies and plans had helped mobilise resources from international and national sources. Denmark, meanwhile, sees the MDGs as the benchmark for its development cooperation programme.³⁶
- The Latin American countries mentioned as a strength the alignment of national, state-level and local plans behind the MDGs, but for other countries it had been more difficult to build strong links between national and subnational levels, especially where, as in Pakistan, a devolution process had recently been undertaken.
- Not all countries believed that the MDGs were well aligned with national priorities, while there had sometimes been a failure to engage non-governmental actors, including the private sector, and to build citizen awareness of and support for the goals.
- In many countries, delivery was held back by a lack of human, financial, and technological capacity and by a failure to prioritise, while progress had often been unevenly distributed, with disadvantaged groups and areas of countries left behind by the development agenda.
- The need to be accountable for the goals had driven important improvements in data and reporting systems, though data was often still weak, especially for disadvantaged groups, and reporting did not always support effective decision-making. Mexico, however, described the success of its purpose-built and autonomous information system for reporting the MDGs.
- Developed countries were criticised for their failure to live up to their obligations under MDG8, not just through the lack of delivery of the 0.7% ODA target, but through a broader failure to support development cooperation in areas such as technology transfer.

03

Delivering the SDGs

The Reality Check roundtables were attended by participants who had been deeply involved in the post-2015 negotiations, by those who had some previous awareness of the emerging framework, and by those who were, for the first time, considering the implications of the proposed goals and targets for the national priorities on which they work.

The experience of implementing the MDGs was widely seen as providing a good starting point for the much greater task of delivering the SDGs, although participants recognised that the integrated and universal nature of the new goals would pose new challenges. As one participant warned, “do not assume that what worked for the MDGs will work for the SDGs.”³⁷ Six main themes emerged from the roundtable discussions.

1. There is general enthusiasm for the potential of the new agenda, combined with some concern about the scale of its ambition.

Commitment to the SDGs is particularly strong in Latin America, given that the region hosted Rio+20 where the new goals were first discussed and Mexico has played a leading role in addressing the challenges of financing for development.³⁸ The four countries represented at the Latin American workshop argued that the post-2015 development agenda had the potential to enrich national policy and strengthen national development plans, although they stressed that the scale of the implementation challenge could not be underestimated.

Participants from other countries also supported the focus on sustainable development, but some were concerned at the scale of the transformation that would be needed in just 15 years. The Pakistan roundtable underlined the

need to be realistic. The country must synchronise the new agenda with its national priorities, but should avoid making commitments that are beyond its resources or capacity to implement. Denmark had argued for a more limited number of goals, but accepted that a reduction is now unlikely. Its government departments are now identifying the targets most relevant to Denmark and on which national resources should be focused.

The two African countries had the greatest concern about the breadth of the proposed agenda, with general agreement in Ghana that the framework needs to be strengthened to make it workable through the agreement of nationally-relevant targets to drive development efforts. Participants from Tanzania estimated that the country had a less than 50% chance of meeting more than half the 169 targets. They argued that there were too many targets and some were not sufficiently specific to be implemented and monitored. They were also concerned about the implications of the agenda’s ‘zero-based’ targets (such as eradicating extreme poverty for all people everywhere), which will prove extremely challenging to deliver given the difficulties of reaching the most marginalised populations.

According to Danish participants, the international community needs to address the risk that countries will “pick and choose the easiest options,” with Latin American countries also alert to the threat to the integrity of the agenda that would result from a failure to implement some parts of the agenda, or from progress in one area leading to reverses in another. In Ghana, there was an especially nuanced debate on prioritisation, with some participants arguing for the importance of maintaining an interlinked and indivisible agenda, and others believing that resources should be devoted to the most important priorities.

2. Participants in all countries agreed that the sustainable development agenda would only succeed if it was “integrated into national planning and translated into policy at national and local levels.”

All countries represented at the roundtable have existing national development plans, although these vary in number (some countries have more than one overlapping plan), coverage of the social, economic and environmental pillars of sustainable development (headline objectives are shown in figure 2), and timing (some are currently being revised, while one is due to last beyond the SDG deadline).

The challenge of integration is not a simple one. Guatemala, for example, has recently launched its first ever national plan, based around a vision of sustainable development with five dimensions (urban and rural development, well-being, prosperity, natural resources, and governance).³⁹ It believes there is “overlap and natural alignment” between this plan and the SDGs, but considerable work will be needed to reconcile its 36 priorities and 80 goals with the 17 SDGs and 169 associated targets.

Mexico has begun exploring how to align its national plans with the post-2015 framework, identifying areas such as sustainable consumption and production (SDG6) where its plans need to be strengthened. Denmark will be revising its National Strategy for Sustainable Development in 2016 and will take this opportunity to update in response to the ambition of the post-2015 agenda.⁴⁰ Tanzania is in a similar position, envisaging some changes in policies, but also taking action to align resources to development priorities, increase accountability and transparency, and increase the role played by public-private partnerships in facilitating the transfer of knowledge and technology needed to achieve development goals.

All countries recognise the critical – and sometimes fragile – link between planning at national, subnational and local levels. Pakistan saw greater coordination between the federal and provincial levels as a priority, with greater investment needed in building the capacity of provinces to deliver. Peru underlined the challenge of improving interagency coordination and the ability of all levels of government to work together at a time when it is undergoing a complex process of devolution and when vulnerable groups are widely dispersed across the country. Ghana also highlighted the need for the ‘localisation’ of the post-2015 agenda, ensuring it delivers outcomes in the communities in which people live.

Figure two: National Plans and their Priorities


Colombia

Colombia National Development Plan 2014–2018

Three pillars:

1. Peace
2. Equality
3. Education

Six cross-cutting strategies:

1. Social mobility
2. Security and justice
3. Competitiveness and strategic infrastructure
4. Transformation of rural areas
5. Green growth
6. Good governance


Ghana

The Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA) II, 2014-2017

The President’s priority areas:

- 1. Investing in people**
Human development, productivity and employment.
- 2. A strong and resilient economy**
Ensuring and sustaining macroeconomic stability, enhancing competitiveness of Ghana’s private sector, and accelerated agriculture modernisation and sustainable natural resource management.
- 3. Expanding infrastructure**
Infrastructure and human settlements development, as well as oil and gas development.
- 4. Transparent, responsive and accountable governance**



Mexico

El Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2013–2018

Five goals:

1. Peace and stability
2. Social inclusion
3. Quality education
4. Prosperity
5. Mexico as a responsible international actor



Guatemala

Plan Nacional de Desarrollo K'atun: nuestra Guatemala 2032

Five dimensions:

1. Urban and rural Guatemala
2. Wellbeing for all
3. Wealth for all
4. Natural resources for today and for the future
5. The state's role as a regulator of human rights and driver of development



Peru

El Plan Bicentenario: El Perú hacia el 2021

Strategic dimensions:

1. Fundamental rights and human dignity
2. Opportunity and access to services
3. State and governance
4. Economy, competitiveness and employment
5. Regional planning and infrastructure
6. Natural resources and environment



Pakistan

Pakistan Vision 2015

Seven pillars:

1. Putting people first, developing human and social capital
2. Achieving sustained, indigenous and inclusive growth
3. Governance, institutional reform and modernisation of the public sector
4. Energy, water and food security
5. Private sector-led growth and entrepreneurship
6. Developing a competitive knowledge economy through value addition
7. Modernisation of transportation infrastructure and greater regional connectivity



Denmark

Vækst med omtanke – Regeringens strategi for bæredygtig udvikling 2009

Nine objectives:

1. Globalisation as a benefit for all
2. Climate change
3. Nature for the future
4. Green innovation in production and consumption
5. Well functioning urban areas
6. Better health for all
7. Knowledge, research and education in an innovative society
8. People as a resource
9. Responsible, long-term and sustainable economic policy



Tanzania

National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty 11, 2010/11–2014/15

Three clusters:

1. Growth for reduction of income poverty
2. Improvement of quality of life and social wellbeing
3. Good governance and accountability

3. Delivery of the post-2015 agenda will be impossible without dynamic country-wide partnerships for sustainable development.

The SDGs provide a vision for sustainable development that can only be delivered with the active participation of government, civil society, and private sector stakeholders. Forming partnerships that have genuine capacity to deliver will be no easy task, given the complexity of large parts of the post-2015 agenda. Roundtable participants emphasised the need for effective mechanisms to mobilise partners and ensure effective coordination across government, between different levels of government, and between government and non-governmental actors. Colombia has formed a high level commission that will lead on SDG implementation, chaired by the national planning department, and with ministerial level representation from across government, and a role for local government, academia, private sector, and civil society.⁴¹ Denmark has also formed an inter-ministerial coordination group. Pakistan has a parliamentary task force which has started the work of bringing consistency and coordination, but roundtable participations recognised that a “powerful mechanism” will be needed once post-2015 delivery begins.

Some participants argued that autonomous institutions can play an important role in leading partnerships, taking ownership of a process that sets targets for a 15 year period and ensuring continuity as administrations change. The Ghana roundtable made a contrasting point, emphasising the need to build links to the political process. “How do we get political parties to adopt and integrate these ideas into their manifestos and campaign programmes?” one participant asked.

A focus on delivery has the potential to ensure that consultation is not a cosmetic exercise, but a process that has purpose and direction. The point was powerfully made at the Ghana roundtable. The private sector’s role must be as an active partner in areas such as the provision of urgently needed social goods, while citizens must be genuinely involved from the beginning in delivering the new agenda. Participation was important in its own right, but would also build the support that would be needed further down the line when increased domestic resources must be mobilised for sustainable development priorities. Pakistan, meanwhile, emphasised the role that young people could play, given that they have most to gain from successful delivery, have the greatest stake in a sustainable future, and are committed to solutions and approaches that challenge business-as-usual.

Participants called on international organisations to support national partnerships, to demonstrate their own ability to work in an integrated manner in country, and to join together to ensure that all goals and targets are being implemented effectively at regional and global levels. In particular, the UN system could provide technical support for data collection, analysis and dissemination, assist with capacity building, and help build awareness of the new development agenda. But as the Latin American countries emphasised, this must be done “without competing with the leadership and guidance that countries set according to their priorities.” The growing importance of South-South cooperation was also recognised, with many countries expecting to deliver sustainable development priorities by adopting innovative models whose effectiveness had been demonstrated in other developing countries.

4. Roundtable participants believe that delivery will rely on a “mobilisation of resources at both international and national levels.”

Colombia has set out an analysis of implementation gaps that it believes threaten its ability to deliver the SDGs.⁴² At the domestic level, it has identified the need for capacity building in research and development, the transfer and development of clean technology, access to concessional financing, especially for resilient development and for adaptation. Internationally, it argues for:

An open, transparent and rules based trade multilateral system, improved access by SMEs to international markets, strengthened international cooperation to curb illicit financial flows, cooperation in tax matters, stable international financial system, [and] more equitable participation of developing countries in the governance structures of international financial institutions.⁴³

Most roundtable participants would find much to agree with in this analysis. At national and international levels, greater resources are needed and budgets must be aligned to sustainable development objectives. But money is only part of the story – participants were more focused on how to build equitable and effective international systems that support sustainable development. The roundtables’ middle income countries think that international financial institutions need to do more to recognise their needs, but realise that scarce finance must be used strategically. All developing countries argue for much greater international commitment to creating a level playing field for countries of all income levels, and to tackling tax avoidance, illicit financial flows, corruption and other abuses that reduce the resources available for sustainable development.

The Ghana roundtable, for example, emphasised the need for improved domestic resource mobilisation, but in ways that do not undermine economic justice and that were combined with a drastic reduction in the ability of multinational companies and investors to exploit the country's natural resources, or avoid paying their fair share of taxation. It was also absurd, participants argued, for developed countries to impose steep tariffs on imports from countries where they were simultaneously distributing aid. Participants from Pakistan called for much greater accountability from developed countries for their post-2015 commitments than had been seen in the MDG era, emphasising areas such as technology transfer, debt forgiveness, and the response to climate change. They also raised the question of the ineffectiveness of too much aid spending.

The FfD conference in Addis Ababa is seen as providing an important opportunity to reform the international economic, financial and tax systems in ways that would support post-2015 delivery, as part of a reinvigorated global partnership for development. Some countries were also focused on particular issues that are likely to resonate in Addis, such as Guatemala's commitment in its national development plan to establish a minimum social floor, based on universal access to social protection, quality health and education services, secure housing and other services needed to ensure a decent standard of living and increase resilience to shocks.⁴⁴ The focus is on responding to inequality in all its forms, matching the proposed FfD commitment that "every woman, every child and every family has access to a nationally agreed package of essential services."⁴⁵

5 ■ Data is seen as fundamental to delivery

All roundtables discussed the task of gathering, analysing and disseminating data to track progress against 169 targets, with participants agreeing that this would be a difficult task and some believing it would exceed current capacity to gather reliable and timely statistics. There was, one roundtable believed, a danger of "greater investment in measuring targets than in implementing them."

But participants were also excited about the potential of the 'data revolution' that has been widely seen as fundamental to the success of the post-2015 development agenda.⁴⁶ The MDGs had stimulated significant improvements in data quality and availability, and the SDGs have great potential to catalyse further advances, especially as technology continues to make it easier to collect and present data. Effective monitoring could be used to identify quickly where progress was

being made, where targets were off track, and where disadvantaged groups continued to be left behind by the new agenda.

The Latin American workshop considered the data requirements of both the MDGs and the SDGs in great detail, including the need for disaggregated data; for information systems that were effective at national, subnational and local levels; and for a balance to be struck between too much information and too little. Participants suggested that statistical agencies would need to be well-funded and preferably autonomous, albeit with the backing of the Head of State or government. Particular care would need to be taken with information sources that were generated outside government, with robust quality control standards needed if this data was to be considered 'official.' Civil society and the media would play an important role in reporting on and responding to the information that new data systems would provide.

Some participants were keen to emphasise that data was about more than retrospective accountability, with the Danish roundtable emphasising that regular reporting of data "should be considered less as a punitive mechanism and more as an instrument for reaching all goals by 2030." Pakistan and Tanzania both have recent experience of the role that data can play in accelerating delivery, offering real-time information on which an evidence-based policy making process can be based. Their roundtables emphasised the need for continued investment in the types of data that would allow for better decision-making, while the Latin American countries stressed the importance of generating data not just on whether targets had been achieved, but on how they could be (for example, by studying the behavioural changes needed to improve the efficiency of energy use).

6 ■ The post-2015 agenda will only succeed if governments take the challenge of delivery seriously.

Most governments recognise that sustainable development presents them with policy challenges that are unprecedented in their complexity. On its own, the political will to tackle these challenges is not enough, it must be matched by the ability to implement policies effectively.

In part, this is about the classic elements of the ‘good governance’ agenda that is covered by some of the post-2015 targets, developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions (16.6), ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making (16.7), and substantially reducing corruption and bribery in all its forms (16.6). The need to “broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance” (16.8) is also essential to ensuring that both global and national governance systems support sustainable development.

But the Reality Check roundtables have highlighted the importance of going beyond these important priorities, as governments increase their capacity to deliver. Most of the countries represented at the roundtables already see this as a priority:

- Guatemala, for example, is developing the “political, legal, technical, administrative and financial capabilities of public institutions, to ensure the state is able to lead the process of sustainable development.”⁴⁷

- Pakistan aims to strengthen and streamline institutions and to invest in “a skilled, motivated and ‘results-focused’ civil service” that can deliver the priorities set out in Pakistan Vision 2025.⁴⁸
- Modern and accessible government is a priority for Mexico, as it aims to deliver effective government services to all parts of the population.⁴⁹

At both of the African roundtables, delivery mechanisms were intensively discussed. Participants from Ghana recommended targeted efforts to enhance the human, technical and financial capacities of all agencies that would be required to play a role in delivering the SDGs. It was important, too, not to forget institutions that would enable effective delivery, such as national statistical offices or those institutions responsible for the revenue mobilisation needed to finance the post-2015 agenda. Tanzania, which has been experimenting with new approaches to delivery through its Big Results Now programme, proposed “the development of a national roadmap for SDG implementation – [including] roles of all stakeholders, drawing on the BRN approach.”

The Latin American countries, finally, pointed out that successful implementation will not happen on its own. All countries must be prepared to invest in the delivery process, and to do so through an intense effort that creates ownership and at levels of government and in all institutions. This must be done now if delivery of the SDGs is to begin in 2016.

“On its own, the political will to tackle these challenges is not enough, it must be matched by the ability to implement policies effectively.”

04

Conclusions and Recommendations

A Post-2015 Reality Check

The world's leaders will soon commit themselves to meet 17 sustainable development goals by 2030, declaring them “an integrated, indivisible set of global priorities for sustainable development.”

The Reality Check roundtables were based on the work of eight countries who have already begun exploring how to turn the promise of a new sustainable development agenda into reality. Collectively, their leadership has provided us with much to build upon. But equally, there should be no cause for complacency.

The task of getting ready to deliver the new agenda is a daunting one.

Here, then, are eight themes, drawn from the roundtables that demonstrate why it's time to get serious about delivery:

Reality Check #1 – We must see action to inspire action

Delivery is the missing ingredient in the post-2015 narrative. When the SDGs are agreed at the UN Summit for the Adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda in September 2015, the public imagination will only be captured if leaders not only announce the new goals, but make concrete and convincing commitments for how they will deliver them at national and international levels.

Reality Check #2 – Delay will be costly for the new agenda

On 1st January 2016, the deadline for meeting the SDGs will be only slightly more than 5,000 days away. That is very little time to achieve goals that require unprecedented improvements to business-as-usual trajectories. The world cannot afford a slow start. If delivery is not underway in the early years of the new agenda, many of the targets will be already out of reach. We must learn from the MDG process and cut the time lag between adoption and action.

Reality Check #3 – We are not yet ready to deliver

This report demonstrates that some governments are already thinking hard about implementation. But there is no single country or institution that has completed its preparations for 2016. It's time for all stakeholders – whether at global, regional, national, subnational or local levels – to redouble their preparations to respond to the policy, strategic, financing and operational challenges of the new agenda.

Reality Check #4 – We shouldn't be afraid of priorities

In the end, the distinction between the integrated and indivisible aspect of the SDGs and the need to set priorities is a false one. No country can do everything at once. All stakeholders must explain where they plan to start, in order to provide a foundation for accelerated delivery of the agenda as a whole in the 2020s.

Reality Check #5 – We must be prepared to tackle the toughest challenges

The SDGs will fail unless they push us beyond business-as-usual. Countries must identify where they need to go further than envisaged in their current development plans, as they seek to end poverty, ensure the protection, survival and development of all children, and build new growth models based on sustainable patterns of consumption and production. If we are to leave no-one behind, for example, then we need dramatic changes in the way we reach the most vulnerable and marginalised people.

Reality Check #6 – We need to think for the long, medium and short term

Countries need to plan for three time horizons. They need a vision for 2030 that explains how they will deliver the promise of the agenda as a whole; an action plan (or plans) that sets out what they will achieve in the first five years and how; and a roadmap for the practical steps need to be taken over one or two years to accelerate delivery in priority areas.

Reality check #7 – We must quickly go beyond the last generation of global goals

The MDGs provide a basis for implementation, and we must commit to finish the job they started, but the new agenda brings many new delivery challenges. It is much broader – demanding a contribution from all parts of society. It has equity at its heart – those at most risk of being left behind should be put first. And it has universality at its heart – developed countries need to make an early commitment to domestic implementation.

Reality Check #8 – The international system must help countries to deliver

Delivery needs investment. It needs expertise. And it needs mechanisms to allow countries, and stakeholders from all sectors, to design responses to shared challenges. The UN system (alongside other international actors) has an important catalytic role to play – first building momentum behind the delivery agenda; then taking action to identify and fill gaps, as implementation gets underway.

Taking Delivery Seriously

The Reality Check roundtables were led by governments and this report has synthesised their findings. The aim has been to present a neutral and balanced review of what governments believe it will take to make the SDGs a success.

In conclusion, we go beyond the roundtables themselves, to present some proposals that would help ensure that all governments and other stakeholders take delivery seriously, looking towards what needs to be done in the wake of the September SDG Summit to ensure rapid implementation in 2016 and 2017.

Immediate priorities are to:

- 1. Build an informal network of centres of excellence for post-2015 implementation**, bringing together best practice in areas such as data, policy development, planning, costing and financing, and coalition building. Governments, international and regional institutions, existing global and regional partnerships, and the academic and think tank community all have a role to play, as does the private sector given its experience in designing and managing complex operations and projects, and civil society with its power to mobilise and to motivate.
- 2. Engage decision makers from across government, with a particular focus on ministries of finance and planning.** All countries should send senior delegations to the Finance for Development conference in Addis Ababa, with the Ministers of Finance and/or of Planning who should play a pivotal role. In preparation for Addis, they or their Head of State should have led cross-government discussions on post-2015 delivery challenges at a national level, and be committed to convening intensive planning processes around priorities for action in the first five years of the agenda, and a roadmap to move from planning to delivery.
- 3. Announce ‘quick start’ packages of financing and other support for delivery at the FfD Conference and SDGs Summit.** National delivery must always come first, but resonant delivery priorities at a global or regional level can also be highlighted. ‘Quick start’ packages will demonstrate how countries plan make a significant and immediate difference to people’s lives, or to support more sustainable patterns of development in the future. Examples might include: delivering the new agenda’s core promises to children; investing in sustainable infrastructure and energy; or tackling the deficits in international taxation and domestic resource mobilisation that make it impossible for countries to invest in sustainable development priorities.⁵⁰
- 4. Position the High Level Political Forum in 2017 as the ‘Delivery Summit’ for the post-2015 agenda.** At the 2016 HLPF, many international, regional, subregional, national and subnational actors should be in a position to present their delivery plans, with ministers clarifying their expectations on timeframes for delivery and mechanisms for reporting results. The 2017 forum will be the next to be held at Head of State level. Its primary purpose should be for countries to showcase what they have begun to deliver, what they have learned from that implementation, and whether their collective efforts are enough to put the world on track to fulfil the SDGs by 2030.

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Delay will be costly for the new agenda

“On 1st January 2016, the deadline for meeting the SDGs will be only slightly more than 5,000 days away. That is very little time to achieve goals that require unprecedented improvements to business-as-usual trajectories. The world cannot afford a slow start. If delivery is not underway in the early years of the new agenda, many of the targets will be already out of reach. We must learn from the MDG process and cut the time lag between adoption and action.”

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