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POLICY BRIEFING

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Institute of Development Studies

Using Human Security Principles to Develop a Post-2015 Framework

2015 marks the deadline for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and it is widely recognised that simply renewing the goals in their current format will not be sufficient. A more analytical and inclusive approach is required. This could be achieved by using human security principles to underpin a post-2015 development framework that would express the values of freedom, dignity, equality, solidarity, tolerance and respect for nature articulated in the Millennium Declaration.

> **'Human security is concerned with safeguarding and expanding people's vital freedoms. It requires both shielding people from acute threats and empowering people to take charge of their own lives'.**
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> Commission on Human Security (2003), *Human Security Now,* Chairs: Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen

A new generation of development goals needs to respond to the significant changes that have taken place in the world since the adoption of the MDGs. Notions of sharp divisions between the 'developed' and 'developing' worlds have shifted. The nature and geography of poverty have changed and a number of political, economic, financial and environmental shocks have created increased uncertainty and vulnerability.

A more sophisticated and inclusive development framework that moves beyond the basic priorities outlined in the current set of goals is required. A framework with human security as its basis would ensure that:

- all areas of the current MDGs are captured in an integrated way;

- both objective human development outcomes and subjective perceptions of personal and community wellbeing are encompassed;

- the new framework leads directly into a discussion regarding joined-up policy responses, combining human and sustainable development.

Why are we not on track to meet the current MDGs?

Progress towards meeting the MDGs by 2015 was set back by the food, fuel and financial shocks that have occurred since 2008. Yet failure to meet the targets cannot be ascribed to these factors alone. Other reasons include:

- The goals were framed as universal commitments to reduce poverty, or other negative indicators, by the same proportion everywhere. So although many poorer countries have made considerable progress, they are still off-track because they have had further to go to meet the targets.

- The goals did not take account of and address deeper structural issues such as systemic economic and social inequalities and lack of sustainability.

- There was no acknowledgement of how the specific problems associated with fragile and conflict-affected states limited or distorted development.

What could succeed the MDGs?

A number of suggestions have been made in terms of replacing the current MDGs, and the UNDP is currently undertaking national consultations in 50 countries. The March 2012 Istanbul Declaration adopted by the Global Human Development Forum calls for 'strong emphasis on social inclusion, social protection, and equity, in recognition of the fact that economic development has too often gone hand in hand with environmental degradation and increased inequality'.

The Colombian and Guatemalan governments have put forward a proposal for a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These are now widely referred to in preparatory discussions for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in June 2012.

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They incorporate the sustainable element that is currently lacking in the MDGs. However, concern has been expressed that the SDGs and other similar suggested approaches do not address fundamental human rights and political dimensions. In addition, many have stressed the need for a participatory approach which involves local communities and adapts the new goals to the specifics of each country.

The case for 'human security' as a conceptual framework

The MDGs have not claimed to be a full expression of human development objectives. But they have provided an international consensus and political focus on some basic priorities. A human security framework continues this focus, but with a more sophisticated and adequate theoretical basis. The human security approach helps to identify priorities within a human-centred development approach, in a more locally flexible and relevant way.

Human security analysis combines attention to the basic requirements of human development while taking account of the risks that these requirements may not be met in the short run or sustained over the longer run. A human security approach involves looking at the lives of individuals and the forces which threaten or sustain core values in their lives. It takes into account how diverse forces concerning the economy, conflict, distribution, environment, health and other areas intersect and determine wellbeing for individuals and communities at particular times and in particular locations.

As the basis of a post-2015 framework this approach can:

1. Make clear how economic poverty, political and personal insecurity and violence, environmental degradation and social exclusion interact and are decisive for human development and wellbeing at individual, community, national and international levels.

2. Promote joined-up thinking by linking different areas of development policy and practice and lead directly to a realistic discussion of policy responses.

3. Address the impact of income and wealth inequalities, precarious employment and social exclusion and take account of a multidimensional understanding of poverty.

4. Inform and enable participatory decision-making and the creation of social contracts between citizens and governments.

5. Apply to all societies, transcending stereotyped notions of developed and developing countries and incorporating new approaches from the 'South'.

Tackling poverty and hunger: Current vs human security approach

The current approach in the MDGs centres on a target of halving poverty measured in terms of money-equivalent income. This does not take into account the changing nature of poverty and fails to address the effect of intersecting inequalities such as exclusion based on ethnicity or caste, compounded by gender or age. There has been an over-reliance on economic growth as a driver of poverty reduction.

Evidence has shown that global malnutrition rates have often not improved with growth. This has been particularly true when growth has left out the rural poor and failed to create jobs or has only led to precarious employment in the informal economy. The concepts of poverty and the approaches adopted do not address economic insecurity, and fail to acknowledge the constant risk and fear of losing one's income and falling into hunger and poverty.

A human security approach would mean placing greater focus on:

- a broader set of measures and indicators of poverty;
- policies for combining pro-poor growth with redistribution;
- access of the poor to assets such as land and other productive resources;
- legislation guaranteeing the right to food, and ensuring access to minimum income by improving social protection in various forms;
- active labour market policies for employment creation which observe core labour standards, and use approaches such as employment guarantee schemes and vocational training;
- adopting and implementing legislation against discrimination and social exclusion;
- improving outreach, quality and cultural relevance of basic social services;
- attention to subjective wellbeing as well as objective outcomes;
- considering ways to minimise risks and ensure sustainability in all the above.

Further Reading

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