



Pacific Institute of Public Policy

Key messages

- » The MDGs were useful, but lacked the scope and specificity to properly address the needs of all developing countries, especially young, small and vulnerable nations. They did not reflect emerging priorities such as climate change and post-conflict nation building, and they ignored the role of wealthy nations in global development.
- » A new set of development priorities is needed. Looking beyond 2015, the inescapable truth is that we need a fundamental shift in development thinking.
- » New visions require new voices. The g7+ group of nations is making itself heard as we begin to define the post-2015 development agenda, asserting that peace-building and state-building goals are essential to development.
- » Ultimately, each nation will chart its own course and identify its own priority areas, but building solidarity and sharing expertise benefits everyone.

Discussion
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24

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BLUE MARBLE

The Pacific in the post-2015 development agenda

On 7 December 1972 members of the Apollo 17 moon mission created an image that would redefine the world. The Big Blue Marble photograph¹, as it became known, depicted a fragile Earth hovering in the void. Human activity continues to change every aspect of our planet, including the climate. We are a species in plague proportions, heading for a global population of nine billion by the middle of this century. Increasing pressures on our natural resources and ecosystems are compounded by unsustainable consumption and a growing divide between rich and poor. We must solve our collective development challenges if we are to secure a viable future. Around the world, thoughts are now turning to what comes after the Millennium Development Goals expire in 2015. As custodians of the world's largest ocean and home to some of its most vulnerable countries, the Pacific has a significant stake in redefining the global approach to development.

Learning from the MDGs

Over the last decade, the Millennium Development goals have been touted as the main benchmark used to measure progress by developing nations. But their scope has not always reflected reality, especially among Pacific island nations. Notable omissions include climate change, ocean management and non-communicable diseases—the latter now the biggest killers in many Pacific countries.² The MDGs were initially intended to be global goals, but not to be applied verbatim at the country level. Papua New Guinea addressed such concerns by tailoring the MDGs through a set of national targets, and others have since recognised the difficulty of applying the MDGs to a region with unique development challenges, including volatile economic growth rates, vulnerability to external shocks, and geographic isolation.³

Most criticisms on the MDGs have been levelled at the top-down, donor-driven process that led to their creation.⁴ It must be said, however, that these goals have been rightly heralded as a factor in accelerated development progress in certain areas—most notably

¹ <http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/IOTD/view.php?id=1133>

² For a description of the NCD crisis in the Pacific, see the World Bank report on 'The Economic Costs of Non-communicable Diseases In the Pacific Islands', 2013

³ See Simon Feeny and Matthew Clarke, 'Challenges of achieving the MDGs in the Pacific', *Pacific Economic Bulletin*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2010.

⁴ For a detailed reflection on the problems resulting from applying global goals nationally, see the paper by Jan Vandemoortele, co-architect of the MDGs, 'Advancing the Global Development Agenda post-2015: some thoughts, ideas and practical suggestions', UN System Task Team On the Post-2015 Development Agenda, 2007.

in relation to access to vaccines and drugs, educational enrolment and the availability of improved water sources. Hence the priority accorded to these areas by Pacific governments and donors.⁵

But, as the saying goes, you can't fatten a pig by weighing it. In a deliberate attempt to produce simple and clearly articulated goals, the focus of the MDGs was on quantitative rather than qualitative improvements. So while eight Pacific island countries are expected to achieve the MDG on universal primary education, this has not resulted in improved learning outcomes. It is one thing getting children into schools, quite another ensuring those schools are equipped to provide a decent education so children have an opportunity to become productive members of society and to live better lives. Worse, most Pacific nations simply do not have the data available to meaningfully measure progress against these quantitative goals.

A new approach is required

Looking beyond 2015, the inescapable truth is that we need a fundamental shift in development thinking. This was clearly expressed at the recent Dili International Conference⁶ in Timor-Leste to assess the MDGs and what comes next. The *Dili Consensus* expresses the shared learning and solidarity of representatives from the 48 countries that participated in the conference. It states:

*Business as usual is not a viable option. We are no longer on the same development journey that we began at the start of the new millennium. We must build a framework for the next era of global development that is legitimate and relevant, truly reflecting the development aspirations and challenges of people everywhere.*⁷

First and foremost, all countries—rich and poor alike—must be included in the post-2015 development agenda. The MDGs were squarely focused on what should be done by and for poorer countries. Yet it should be clear that wealthy nations also have an integral role to play in facing global development challenges. Numerous transnational impacts from high-income states are diverting and even curbing development opportunities in low-income countries. In the Pacific, the list includes failure to mitigate carbon emissions, overfishing by foreign fleets, and the conduct of resource extracting multinational corporations. Tax avoidance and corruption hinder the collection and management of government revenues necessary to deliver services to the people. Their proceeds are knowingly re-routed for investment in high-income countries, and much more can and should be done to repatriate ill-gotten gains to their country of origin. After acknowledging their own weak state capacity, the participants in the Dili Conference noted the importance of improvements in 'the policies and practices of many of the developed countries with whom we interact, including in the area of trade, the regulation of the activities of multinational corporations and the management

⁵ Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, '2012 Pacific Regional MDGs Tracking Report', 2012.

⁶ The Government of Timor-Leste hosted government and civil society representatives from 48 nations from across the Pacific, the g7+ group of countries, and the group of Portuguese-speaking African countries (PALOP) at the Dili International Conference on the post-2015 development agenda on 26-28 February 2013—see <http://www.pacificpolicy.org/blog/2013/03/07/development-by-all-and-for-all>

⁷ The *Dili Consensus* is available to download from <http://www.g7plus.org/the-dili-consensus/>

of aid', and recommended that 'our development partnerships be based on mutual trust rather than conditionality'.⁸

Since the 2008 global financial crisis, assumptions about manic, unrestricted consumption and economic growth have come into question, with emphasis increasingly shifting from growth to well-being. In his influential book, *Prosperity Without Growth*, Tim Jackson⁹ studies the links between lifestyle, societal values and the environment to question the primacy of economic growth. Written before the financial crisis was unleashed upon the world, Jackson notes: 'Questioning growth is deemed to be the act of lunatics, idealists and revolutionaries. But question it we must'. Times have changed, and in reviewing the book, George Monbiot¹⁰ writes:

Jackson accepts that material well-being is a crucial component of prosperity, and that growth is essential to the well-being of the poorest nations. But in countries like the UK, continued growth and the policies which promote it undermine prosperity, which he defines as freedom from adversity or affliction. This means, among other blessings, health, happiness, good relationships, strong communities, confidence about the future, a sense of meaning and purpose.

In July 2011, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted *Resolution 65/309—Happiness: towards a holistic approach to development*¹¹ in recognition the usual measure of nations by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) does not adequately reflect that happiness is a fundamental human goal and universal aspiration. The 2012 *World Happiness Report*¹² calls for a change to the development agenda from focusing primarily on economic growth to take in all domains of well-being. Perhaps the most well-known pursuit of this approach is the Bhutanese Gross National Happiness¹³ measure, and now others are following suit. Vanuatu piloted alternative indicators of well-being for Melanesia in 2012, which focused on resource access, cultural practice, and community vitality to better track the factors that contribute to well-being.¹⁴

The widely reported *2012 Living Planet Report*¹⁵ starkly alerts us that we are 'using one and a half planets' worth of resources, and will need the equivalent of two Earths by 2030 if we continue

⁸ *The Dili Consensus*, February 2013

⁹ Tim Jackson is an ecological economist and Professor of Sustainable Development at the University of Surrey. His 2009 book, *Prosperity Without Growth: economics for a finite planet*, is available from <http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9781844078943/>

¹⁰ George Monbiot's review 'Out of the ashes—Now is the time to start planning for a new economy, not dependent on growth' was published in *The Guardian* newspaper on 22 August, 2011 and can be viewed online at <http://www.monbiot.com/2011/08/22/out-of-the-ashes/>

¹¹ http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/65/309

¹² The first 'World Happiness Report' was released at the UN High Level Meeting on Happiness in April 2012. The report, titled *Life Beyond Growth: Alternatives and Complements to GDP-Measured Growth as a Framing Concept for Social Progress* can be downloaded from <http://www.isisacademy.com/resources>

¹³ In the early 1970s, the Kingdom of Bhutan introduced this measurement, focussing on well-being rather than economic productivity.

¹⁴ *The Alternative Indicators of Well-Being for Melanesia: Vanuatu pilot study (2012)* report can be downloaded from the Vanuatu National Statistics Office—<http://www.vnso.gov.vu>. The pilot has now been taken up by the Melanesian Spearhead Group with the view to applying across the Melanesian countries—PNG, Solomon Islands and Fiji.

¹⁵ The *Living Planet Report (2012)* was produced by WWF Global in collaboration with the Zoological Society of London and the Global Footprint Network and can be downloaded online at http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/all_publications/living_planet_report/

along this trajectory. Put simply, we cannot continue to deplete natural resources faster than they can be replaced, while polluting our environment and atmosphere. Just as some economists and ecologists challenge the status quo, others are amplifying their calls to redress the imbalances, exploitation and unfairness in present global systems.

We are not alone

This new vision promises to be as transformative to development as the Big Blue Marble photograph was to our view of the world. But new visions require new voices. Following the lead of the so-called BRIC countries, the developing world is finally finding its place on the international stage. Witness the emergence of new international groupings such as the g7+,¹⁶ and the re-emergence and newfound relevance of existing groupings such as the Small Island Developing States (SIDS)¹⁷ and the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG).¹⁸ This process of realignment and reinvigoration has the potential to produce radical new ideas and, importantly, to capitalise on growing south-south development partnerships, allowing them potentially to gain momentum with or without the approval of developed nations.

A global newcomer, the g7+, has been particularly successful in collaborating on issues around aid management, resource extraction and revenue management. While some nations have politely endorsed the MDGs without criticism, the g7+ group of countries has highlighted a critical shortcoming in terms of ensuring an enabling environment to bring about sustainable development. Through the *New Deal*¹⁹, the g7+ advocates for the recognition of peace, security and justice as fundamental prerequisites for nation building. Peace-building and state-building goals are particularly relevant for post-conflict nations, but they apply equally to new and to vulnerable countries, such as those in the Pacific. These nations are still seeking to build a sense of national identity and harmony amidst a maelstrom of competing forces. Peace-building and state-building are about strengthening—and, in some cases, creating—the social contract between governments and the people they serve, as well as ensuring that the institutions of the state are equipped to deliver essential services, to protect the environment and to establish the economic conditions needed for people to find gainful employment.

What matters most for the Pacific

Held on the sidelines of the Dili International Conference, the Pacific Roundtable Consultation was a chance for representatives from Pacific island countries to come together and share their frank views on the MDG process. Participants spoke honestly

and openly about the challenges they face in countries that are amongst the weakest when measured against the global goals. Some of the Pacific concerns about the MDG process found expression in the *Dili Consensus*:

We know that many of us will not achieve most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We know that the well-being of our people depends upon the achievement of outcomes that were not adequately reflected in the MDGs, most notably in the areas of peace and justice and climate change.

Maintaining a sense of domestic peace and stability whilst trying to build the organs of an efficient state were challenges that everybody seemed to face. Ownership was also a key theme of discussions, with Pacific participants noting 'we need to own our problems, and understand their root causes, in order to develop effective, culturally sensitive solutions to our development challenges'. To take charge of domestic development goals that are 'linked but not subordinate to the global development agenda' Pacific participants declared 'we must deconstruct our colonial thinking and start truly conducting ourselves as independent states'.²⁰

As greater global attention shifts to the region, geopolitical rivalries mean that aid budgets are increasing, flowing on a scale never seen before. Money, in other words, is no longer the issue it was. While it is easy to criticise donors, Pacific governments need to take responsibility for better management and service delivery to their people.

Unsurprisingly, climate change was the central focus of the Pacific Roundtable Consultation, with participants noting:

We are not part of the cause of climate change; nor can we manage its inevitable effects on our own. We must hold to account the countries that contribute most to the problem, and marshal international support for climate change mitigation, adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies. To this end, we need to explore regional mechanisms and approaches that pool resources and share risks. We agreed there is a need for donors and international organisations to greatly simplify criteria and processes for accessing climate change financing, which is particularly disadvantageous to small states.

It is impossible to talk about development in the Pacific without considering the impact of climate change, which is an existential issue for many countries—particularly the atoll states. The MDGs preceded global awareness on this topic, so understandably the goals did not include specific measures on adaptation and mitigation. But the interpretation of the goal on improving environmental sustainability (MDG7) in the Pacific includes an assessment of the national carbon emissions. It is laughably unrealistic to suggest climate change mitigation is the responsibility of Pacific countries.²¹

Clearly, the MDGs were not suitable to cover every development challenge. There is no broad agreement on what was missed in

¹⁶ Comprising: Afghanistan, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Liberia, Papua New Guinea, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Sudan, Timor-Leste and Togo. See <http://www.g7plus.org>

¹⁷ Currently comprises 52 small island states across the Caribbean, the Pacific, Africa, the Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and South China Sea—see <http://www.un.org/special-rep/ohrls/sid/list.htm>

¹⁸ The MSG comprises the independent states of PNG, Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu together with the Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste, FLNKS of New Caledonia—see <http://www.msgsec.info>

¹⁹ *The New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States*, which builds on the vision and principles articulated from the Millennium Declaration to the Monrovia Roadmap, proposes key peacebuilding and statebuilding goals, focuses on new ways of engaging, and identifies commitments to build mutual trust and achieve better results in fragile states.


²⁰ The full text of the key conclusions from the discussions among Pacific island countries at the Dili International Conference is available at <http://www.pacificpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/PacificRoundtableOutcome.pdf>

²¹ Greenhouse gas emissions are used in the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, '2012 Pacific Regional MDGs Tracking Report'.

terms of the fundamentals of human development, but among those most frequently cited are: equitable growth; peace; security (including economic, social and environmental security); respect for human rights; effective, transparent and accountable institutions; access to energy and 'connectivity' through physical infrastructure; and the creation of decent jobs.

As the process gets underway to determine the post-2015 development agenda, Pacific policy makers and influencers have the opportunity to identify and articulate their most crucial development priorities. Identifying the gaps will likely result in a competition of ideas about what is best done to make people's lives better. Tragically, that competition consists overwhelmingly of the protestations and pronouncements of those NGOs, advocacy groups and others with a vested interest in development as it has been practiced in the past. No matter how well-intentioned the views, they cannot be allowed to drown out the voice of the people themselves.

There are a number of proposals circulating for the architecture and timing of the post-2015 development framework. Most of these have concerned possible new goals, either in addition to existing goals, or starting from a clean slate. The former raises questions about the status of the MDGs after 2015. It is generally assumed that any new framework, or set of goals will again follow a 15-year window through to 2030.

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Key for the Pacific will be ensuring a framework that acknowledges the unique issues faced by small island and fragile states. As the Rio+20 outcomes document shows,²² there is recognition that such countries have so far experienced uneven progress at best. It emphasises the importance of ocean-based resource management (the so-called Blue Economy) and makes a clear connection between resource management and poverty eradication. But aside from this passing tip of the hat, it offers little insight or guidance concerning the protection and fostering of this critical resource. These unique circumstances and requirements must be affirmed in any realistic post-2015 development narrative. Recognising the unique challenges faced by Pacific countries does not detract from the need for universally applicable goals. Furthermore, the process of applying any or all such goals at the national level needs careful handling, and should therefore be country-led. Papua New Guinea's example of tailored national targets provides a good case study.

Separate to the post-2015 framework are the negotiations taking place on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emerged out of the Rio+20 process. Such a separation of approaches is costly, inefficient, and runs the risk of weakening both initiatives. The management of the climate change challenge and the sustainable use of resources are prerequisites for successful development in Pacific countries; we are the ones who suffer most when action is diverted or delayed.

²² The Future We Want: Outcome Document at Rio+20, pdf accessed online April 19, 2013, <http://www.uncsd2012.org/content/documents/727The%20Future%20We%20Want%2019%20June%201230pm.pdf>

The post-2015 development framework is supposed to be a more inclusive process than that which produced the MDGs. In attempting to achieve this aim, the UN has been conducting activities throughout the Pacific, including youth-focused and online consultations.²³ A global online survey²⁴ is also underway to capture people's voices, priorities and views. It is important to reach out beyond the usual development actors to hear the voices of the most vulnerable and marginalised peoples. Many countries have engaged (or are in the process of engaging) with their populations to determine their development priorities. A far-reaching consultation exercise was undertaken by the Dili Conference hosts, the Government of Timor Leste, in late 2012. It is a worthy example of how to include citizen voices in setting the development agenda.

There are many miles to go before the post-2015 development agenda is set. In addition to the flurry of international negotiations and national consultations, the period between now and 2015 will be characterised by a final push to meet the MDGs. It is up to Pacific leaders to determine the region's development priorities, and put them forward on the international stage. If Pacific nations are to progress, we need to be bolder in confronting more complex areas of development—such as getting a better deal on our resources, avoiding the debt trap, finding effective tools to enforce environmental protection and tax compliance. Reducing reliance on a centralised, fossil fuel-driven energy economy is also imperative.

Part of the challenge in this process is to find ways to streamline and consolidate policy initiatives via various groupings, whether it be sub-regionally, regionally, or internationally. Ultimately, each nation will chart its own course and identify its own priority areas, but building solidarity and sharing expertise benefits everyone.

This paper does not pretend to be an exhaustive analysis of the issues that could be included in a new development agenda. Rather, it is presented as a discussion starter to encourage more national, regional and sub-regional thinking and consultations. These in turn should feed into the international deliberations before the UN General Assembly meets to determine how to make the world a better place.

The Big Blue Marble captured by the Apollo space missions has existed since before history began. It took the vision and ambition of the space programme to show it to us. Likewise, the post-2015 development agenda provides us with the opportunity to accept a new, more accurate vision of global development. But it will take equal ambition and commitment for us to embrace and to achieve its goals.

²³ For details on the youth consultation, see UNDP Pacific Centre: <http://www.undppc.org.fj/pages.cfm/newsroom/press-releases/2012/pacific-youth-voices-on-post-2015-development-agenda-.html>

²⁴ <http://www.myworld2015.org>