

Post-2015 Development agenda for the Pacific and its implications for public policy

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-- ABSTRACT --

'Post-2015 Development agenda for the Pacific and its implications for public policy'

The international development agenda is now focused on what comes after the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) expire in 2015. For the Pacific to get the most from the post-2015 development framework, countries will need to articulate their specific development priorities that respond to local challenges, and at the same time take a position on some of the universal issues surrounding sustainable and inclusive development, including: climate change, migration, trade and an increasingly interconnected world economy. There are a number of proposals for the architecture of the post-2015 development framework, most of which are concerned with what gets included in any new set of goals, and how they will be implemented at the national level. The MDGs were criticised for being technocratic, non-transparent and being an essentially donor-driven exercise. It is now widely accepted that the post-2015 development agenda must be country-led, and include broad based national consultations. Derek Brien will present an overview of the consultations and negotiations that have taken place to date, with the view of stimulating further discussion amongst Pacific policy makers and influencers so that the post-2015 development framework responds to the specific needs of the most vulnerable and marginalised in our region.

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The theme of this conference - *addressing inequality and promoting inclusive and sustainable development* - is very timely. Because let's face it, despite all the thinking that has been done, all the reports that have been written, and all the money that has been spent in the name of 'development' we have failed to get to the root causes of poverty, exclusion and inequality. Sustainable development remains but a lofty dream.

In two weeks time world leaders will come together in New York at the UN General Assembly to consider what comes after the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which expire in 2015. There will be much fanfare about how the MDGs rallied support to tackle important global issues, and a battle cry will go out in a last ditched effort to meet the targets that were set 13 years ago. Instead of getting caught up in a universal back slapping exercise, we will be better served if our leaders face the sobering, inescapable truth – that we need a fundamental shift in our approach to aid and development. Let's step back for a moment - to the dawn of the new millennium.

Again in New York, in September 2000, the world's leaders signed on to the *Millennium Declaration*¹. The essence of this comprehensive political statement was to reaffirm collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity and set the foundations for a more peaceful, prosperous and just world. It is worth reading this globally agreed upon statement again to remind ourselves how we have failed.

In a deliberate attempt to simplify the messaging, the eight chapters of the declaration were distilled into eight global headline goals – the MDGs. Cobbled together behind closed doors by technocrats, the resulting quantitative goals and targets cast aside many of the political

¹ <http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>

aspirations and ideals that underpinned the Millennium Declaration. To be clear the eight goals did not mirror the eight chapters of the declaration. Gone or lost in the mire of targets and indicators were the key objectives of peace and security, the special circumstances of small island developing states, the much needed focus on creating decent jobs for our young people, building effective public institutions, delivering essential infrastructure, and confronting the causes of climate change.

The simplified, and supposedly measurable, goals and targets became the main benchmark to measure development progress across the world. In the latter half of the last decade we became obsessed with measuring and reporting.

But as the saying goes, *you can't fatten a pig by weighing it!*

So while eight Pacific island countries are expected to achieve the MDG on achieving 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 our children have an opportunity to become productive members of society and have the choices to live better lives.

Most Pacific nations simply did not – and in many cases still do not have the data available to meaningfully measure progress against many of these international goals. Worse, the global scope of priorities did not always accord with pressing national development priorities in our countries.

That is why the post-MDG focus for education, for example, is on providing quality learning – and life long learning opportunities. It is why the focus on health needs to go beyond the big-ticket items of HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB to cover investment in non-communicable diseases – including diabetes, cancer and heart disease, which are now amongst the biggest killers in many Pacific countries².

If we are brutally honest, the MDGs were squarely focused on what should be done by and for poorer countries – with a specific focus on sub-Saharan Africa.

As a region, we have been collectively labelled a failure in terms of meeting the MDGs. At the country level, however, the picture is more complex. Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Kiribati are not on track for meeting any of the goals, while Cook Islands and Niue are on track for meeting seven of the eight MDGs. All other countries lie somewhere in between. The situation is even more complex if you look at the results at the sub-national level³.

So what does this mean as we look forward to 2015?

Three main things:

- Firstly, we need to get the process right to ensure national ownership and relevance;
- secondly we need to ensure we are tackling the right issues in the right places; and
- then we need to radically alter the way we do development. As I started out by saying, we need a fundamental shift in development thinking.

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; and for a discussion on how the exclusion of NCDs from the MDGs may have restricted funding opportunities see Joel Negin and Helen M. Robinson, 'Funding for HIV and Non-Communicable Diseases: Implications for Priority Setting in the Pacific Region', Health Policy and Health Finance Knowledge Hub Working Paper 1, 2010.

³ See Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (2012), *Pacific Regional MDGs Tracking Report* for a detailed breakdown of the progress made on each MDG for the region, sub-regions, and individual Pacific island countries.

Process

Few people dare criticise the MDGs – at least publicly as for many ‘in development’ it is their bread and butter.

Amongst those that do, the key complaint has been levelled at the top-down, donor-driven process that led to their creation – a criticism that has also been made by one of the key architects of the MDGs.⁴ So it must be true!

And it simply can’t happen this time.

Over the last year there has been a flurry of activity as armies of academics, bureaucrats, technocrats, NGO types, activists and politicians around the globe have sought to influence the shape of the post-2015 development agenda. The extent and level of broader consultation has been encouraging.

But it has also unleashed a massive international lobbying effort – everyone wants their cause to be a new goal to maximise funding opportunities – or at least mitigate funding losses. 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 up until now. No matter how well intentioned the views, they cannot be allowed to drown out the voices of the people themselves.

In the first half of this year I was privileged to have had the opportunity to work in a supporting role to H.E. Emilia Pires, finance minister of Timor-Leste, in her capacity as a member of the UN Secretary General’s High Level Panel to create a bold, but also practical, vision for the post-2015 development agenda.

That panel of 26 eminent thinkers – chaired by the presidents of Liberia and Indonesia together with the UK prime minister - consulted with over 5,000 civil society organisations in about 120 countries and 250 companies in 30 countries. It also drew on the global MyWorld⁵ survey, in which over half a million people have voted for their development priorities.

The Pacific’s voice has not been very loud, but has been captured. In February this year, we at the Pacific Institute of Public Policy co-hosted a Pacific Roundtable Consultation on the sidelines of the Dili International Conference⁶. In a refreshingly frank exchange of views and experiences, that round table consultation made a number of pointed and pertinent conclusions⁷ that were delivered by Minister Pires to the High Level Panel.

In terms of process, the Dili Consensus echoed the growing global sentiments ‘that national development frameworks must reflect national priorities and circumstances. They should be aligned with, but not subordinate to, global goals’. That is the sort of fundamental shift we need.

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.

⁵ <http://www.myworld2015.org>

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

⁷ The full text of the key conclusions from the discussions among Pacific island participants at the Dili International Conference is available online at <http://www.pacificpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/PacificRoundtableOutcome.pdf>

The UN has set in train a series of processes that will culminate in a global summit this time next year to launch a new set of development goals. These include the UN Secretary General's High Level Panel, The Open Working Group on Sustainable Development and the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing – to name but a few. In addition many development agencies, interest groups, multinational corporations and academics have put forward their own proposals for what should succeed the MDGs. These will need to be streamlined into a single, country led process in the lead up to the 2015 global summit.

So far the only 'official' report on the post-2015 development agenda is that of the High Level Panel, which was delivered to the UN Secretary General and member states in May this year. That report champions a once in a generation opportunity to end extreme poverty. It has to be said this is both ambitious and perhaps risks over simplifying the development agenda. At the same time it has been criticised for not going far enough – ending extreme poverty has been defined as ensuring that by 2030 no one is earning less than \$1.25 per day. Currently there are 1.2 billion people in this category. But is that enough? There is a much larger proportion of the global population living on \$2 a day, and many government and NGOs are as, if not more, concerned about tackling this as a poverty objective.

One of the biggest challenges for the High Level Panel was what to leave out. The report includes 12 illustrative goals and 54 targets. The Secretary General's subsequent report, to be tabled at the General Assembly, expands on that – and while he does not refer to them as goals – points to 14 transformative actions that must apply to all countries.

Issues

Which brings us to prioritising the issues to focus on. With so much at stake in terms of development financing and protecting national interests, this is where the competition and tensions will rise. Throw in the lobbying from businesses, NGOs and other civil society groups and one thing is for sure – the road to 2015 is going to be a bumpy journey.

Already there is much contention around the priorities flagged in the UN Secretary General and High Level Panel reports, namely around acting on climate change, building peace and effective institutions, recognising the positive contribution of migration and addressing demographic challenges.

Probably the only way to avoid the whole process grinding down in negotiation grid lock is to aim for a set of aspirational global goals, with each country being then left to prioritise its development agenda based on the national circumstance and interest.

There has been talk of a goal architecture that would be something of a drop down menu to choose from. Some kind of mechanism like this will be essential as clearly priorities will differ.

In this part of the world we naturally will have a strong focus on ocean resource management. That will not be relevant to landlocked nations.

Climate change was unsurprisingly a key part of the discussions at the Dili conference. Put simply, we are not the cause of this problem. We should not be focusing on reducing our carbon footprint or otherwise being drawn into climate change mitigation strategies. Our focus should simply be on adaptation strategies – and that is not just building sea walls or climate proofing infrastructure – whatever that means – but investing in first class education systems and creating employment and migration opportunities so our populations can adapt and if necessary migrate with dignity and choice.

The Dili Consensus articulated another four major areas not adequately treated in the MDGs: inclusive economic growth, peacebuilding, statebuilding and environmental management.

It was also suggested, and in line with the UN reports, that the existing goals in relation to health, education, women's empowerment, water and sanitation, and global partnerships should remain but with substantial refinements to suit the new development context.

What we do not need is an uncontrollable shopping list of development issues – our thinkers and leaders are going to have put in considerable effort to decide where we best focus our development efforts.

A new development partnership

But all of this can only happen if we have a substantial shift in how we deliver aid and approach development.

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. So in addition to ensuring our development priorities are captured in the new global development goals, we need to ensure that we have a say in how they will be delivered.

If we are brutally honest, the aid and development story so far is of 'things being done to the Pacific' – out of the noble intention of outsiders to save us, or the evil intentions of others to dominate. With apologies to the well-intentioned 'do-gooders', both scenarios can be damaging for our young nations emerging out of the shackles of colonialism.

Ownership was a key theme of the Pacific discussions in Dili. We need to own our problems, and understand their root causes, in order to develop effective, culturally sensitive solutions to our development challenges. We ourselves must define our national development priorities based on self-assessments. Our donor partners need to more closely align their activities with our nationally defined priorities.

It was pointedly put that 'we must deconstruct colonial thinking and start truly conducting ourselves as independent states'.

The critical difference between the MDGs and what will come next – likely to be called Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - is that they must apply universally. It cannot be just about developing countries. About 'saving poor people'.

The transition is occurring and in part due to the rise in south-south cooperation. So called developing countries are emerging as donors – even in our region with the most prominent being PNG. The emergence of non-traditional (or non-OECD) donors is changing the game significantly – there is a lot of criticism of cheque book diplomacy and the lack of transparency, but it could also be argued that the rules of engagement are actually becoming more open and honest. It begs the question. Fundamentally, what is aid for? Is it simply a genuine gift giving between friends? Is it compensation for past and current misdeeds? Is it a foreign policy conduit to spread influence? A boomerang windfall for contractors? To answer this we need to consider the link between aid and foreign policy. Some like to think the two should be at arms length. The reality is that they are not. So perhaps we should all be more honest about that.

The transition is also occurring in an increasingly turbulent world. The shifting tide of geopolitics sees the Asia Pacific region now the focus of global economic and strategic competition. This presents many opportunities – but also dangers – to our island states.

We are living in a time when more than ever, people are questioning the big decision-makers – whether it is the banks, the multinational corporations, the multilateral 'development' agencies and even governments – especially governments, even in some of the world's strictest autocracies.

The pace of change in a more interconnected world is particularly daunting. Rapid urbanisation, and the enormity of geopolitical forces now at play; serve as stark wake up calls to our leaders. The scramble for mineral and marine resources will further exacerbate this struggle. All of this is befalling a region that is still finding its identity. At every level there are serious challenges in the search to be constantly redefining our place in the world, and improving the quality of life at home.

Leaving the high-income states out of the MDGs was a mistake.

The most notable failures have been the broken promises of free and fair trading systems, failure to mitigate climate change, overfishing by foreign fleets, and the conduct of resource extracting multinational corporations, especially in our region in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands.

As Pacific governments seek to develop the capacity to better collect and manage revenues to deliver essential services to their populations, these efforts can be hindered through tax avoidance and corruption – the proceeds of which have knowingly ended up being invested in high-income countries.

There is a growing call for improving governance over these issues, and making high-income countries responsible for their transnational impacts - cracking down on illicit capital flows, returning stolen assets and stemming tax avoidance and evasion – again, this is especially an issue for the resource rich countries in our region.

The re-forged development partnerships must be based on mutual trust and shared but differentiated responsibility.

Many of our countries consider themselves overburdened by the multiplicity of international agreements, policy commitments, and related implementation and reporting requirements. The UN Secretary general's report concludes by stating that multilateralism is being tested. As is regionalism.

Defining a global post-2015 development agenda in this context is not going to be an easy task.

If the Pacific voice is to be heard within what is sure to be a hotly contested negotiation, we need our leaders to step up their presence on the international stage. To do that they need to be representing the voices of our people. To hear those voices we need our governments and NGOs to be consulting widely. We need our researchers to be providing the information and evidence to support our claims. More than ever, the role of debate, quality information and data are essential ingredients to our development prospects.

In that light I very much look forward the presentations to follow over the coming days. I hope that we have more informed debates about what we want for our countries, our region and the world in the next 15, 30 or 50 years. Quality research will not only help us find some answers, but hopefully will throw up more questions that will guide our thinking and decision making into the future.

The conversations about the post-2015 development agenda are going on New York and so far we have been largely absent from the table. We need to be part of them.

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