

Full response to the Synthesis Report of the Secretary General

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absolute poverty
by 2030



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Introduction

On the day of its launch last week, Development Initiatives (DI) welcomed the publication of the Synthesis Report of the UN Secretary General (UNSG) on the Post-2015 Agenda: [**The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet**](#). We published a short, immediate response in this [press release](#). Having had further time to reflect on report, this briefing provides a more detailed analysis and commentary.

We applaud the high level of ambition set out in the UNSG's synthesis report, especially its emphasis on transformational action to end poverty for all, leaving no one behind. The report includes strong – and very welcome – language on the need to address “gross” and “intolerable” inequalities. It also highlights the need for multilateral action to tackle universal challenges. The themes of transformation, universality and inequality feature throughout the report, and contribute to its overall sense of vision.

The report points to the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in mobilising international action to address complex challenges (paragraph 17). It notes that the world has halved extreme poverty in the two decades since 1990, and averted millions of deaths from preventable and treatable diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. It makes the case for investing in the “unfinished business” of the MDGs, and using them as a springboard to the future we want – “a future free from poverty and built on human rights, equality and sustainability” (paragraph 18).

The inclusivity of the consultation process on the post-2015 framework is highlighted (paragraphs 37-47), and the importance of maintaining this as the process moves forward in order to ensure legitimacy is noted. This is clearly a plus, particularly given that a lack of adequate consultation is a criticism frequently levelled at the MDG framework. The downside is the risk that this could result in a framework that seeks to be all things to all people and loses the simplicity and focus that were seen as key to the success of the MDGs.

This risk is explicitly recognised in the report, which notes the possibility of retaining the 17 goals proposed by the Open Working Group whilst framing them in a “focused and concise manner” (paragraph 63). In principle, this looks like an eminently sensible approach, which balances the need to retain inclusivity and legitimacy with the need to achieve clarity and simplicity. It remains to be seen what the results of this balancing act will look like in practice.

It is also essential that all stakeholders are clear on how the [Third International Conference on Financing for Development](#) (to be held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in July 2015) seeks to underpin the commitments made in post-2015 process and how financing commitments will relate to the 'means of Implementation' targets. There is a danger that negotiations and commitments on financing for sustainable development could be made in two separate UN processes. This would result in a diffusion of efforts in reaching a transformative outcome in

both tracks, and could lead to a lack of momentum in implementation and difficulty in monitoring commitments by civil society. Clarity on this front would be welcome in coming weeks. It is essential that the end goal – mobilising more and better resources to support sustainable development and poverty eradication – be the primary objective of the conference in Addis Ababa. As the Secretary General says, it is time to move away from “business as usual” (paragraph 22) and focus on how the international community can deliver real change.

In the synthesis report, the Secretary General proposes his own framing based on six essential elements for delivering the sustainable development goals (SDGs) (paragraph 66):

- Dignity: to end poverty and fight inequality
- People: to ensure healthy lives, knowledge and the inclusion of women and children
- Prosperity: to grow a strong, inclusive and transformative economy
- Planet: to protect our ecosystems for all societies and our children
- Justice: to promote safe and peaceful societies, and strong institutions
- Partnership: to catalyse global solidarity for sustainable development

Under the first element, the synthesis report confirms that eradicating poverty by 2030 should be the overarching objective of the sustainable development agenda (paragraph 67). Having campaigned for an ambitious target for eradicating poverty for many years, DI is pleased that the report supports the view that this can be achieved “within one more generation” (paragraph 28). Similarly, the emphasis on addressing inequality, including income inequality, is one we welcome.

The second element emphasises once again the need to ensure that no one is left behind, and it makes a strong case for the inclusion of women and girls in all aspects of the agenda (paragraph 69). The need to address gender inequality is a central theme of the report and one that is mentioned repeatedly throughout – we believe that this will be widely welcomed. However, to ensure no one is left behind more emphasis should be provided to **all** marginalized communities including disabled people and those marginalized as a result of their ethnicity, age and as a result of their sexual orientation.

Under the heading of prosperity, the report highlights the need for economic growth to lead to shared prosperity (paragraph 72). While we obviously support the call for growth to be inclusive, we note the most recent evidence that growth alone will not be sufficient to end poverty by 2030. Latest estimates suggest that [400 million people could still be living in extreme poverty by 2030](#) unless additional action is taken.

We are therefore pleased to see several references to the need for social protection for all (e.g., paragraph 72). We believe that cash transfer schemes have a critical role to play in lifting people out of poverty, as has been demonstrated by initiatives such as [Bolsa Familia in Brazil](#). While we share the report’s view that the primary responsibility for ensuring social protection floors rests with national governments (paragraph 91), our concern is that many of the poorest countries will not be able to afford to implement and sustain such schemes from their own resources. We have argued for a basic minimum income guarantee aimed at ensuring that no one is forced to live below the \$1.25-a-day poverty line. We believe there is a clear case for using international resources – including official development assistance (ODA) – to act as a back-stop to nationally led social protection programmes. This would help countries that cannot afford the full cost of such schemes to implement them on a universal basis.

The section addressing the planet highlights the need to tackle climate change, a critical element of the sustainable development agenda that was not captured by the MDGs.

While the justice element includes a passing reference to access to information, DI is disappointed that this issue was not given greater prominence in the report. Along with others, we had argued for [access to information to be a goal within its own right](#). Given the emphasis on transformation throughout the report, we would have expected to see much greater focus on this issue.

The sixth element on partnership focuses on the need to mobilise resources from all sources to achieve the SDGs and to involve all stakeholders in this process. While this is welcome, the report is relatively weak on bringing the private sector into this process. We would like to have seen more emphasis on setting targets to mobilise private sector contributions, and on increasing the transparency of private sector flows.

The Secretary General is clear in his report that “business as usual” will not deliver the ambitions of this agenda, and that its credibility “rests on the means that are available to implement it”. We strongly support this sentiment and believe that the forthcoming conference in Addis Ababa must result in agreement to mobilise all resources – public and private, domestic and international – to meet existing financing for development targets and support the ambitious agenda set out in this report.

We therefore support the Secretary General's call that all countries must have country-owned national development plans that ensure coherence across domestic policies for development and mobilise a wide range of resources to meet national goals. We welcome the report's recognition that within this mix of resources ODA will continue to play a central and catalytic role (paragraph 90). We strongly support the Secretary General's recommendation that “all developed countries should meet the 0.7% target and agree to concrete timetables to meet ODA commitments” (paragraph 98). Within the current process for redefining ODA, DI has pressed for ODA to be explicitly targeted on poverty (instead of its current broad official mandate of promoting “economic development and welfare”), for donor agencies to include “poverty eradication” in their operational objectives/mandates, and for ODA to be tightly focused on meeting the needs of the poorest 20% of people.

In that context, we want to underscore that, for a financing framework to be fit for purpose well into the future, country-income based allocations of ODA are increasingly inappropriate. We must work together to target interventions at poor people, not countries, and all financing providers must be held accountable for their impacts on poor communities through a robust monitoring and accountability framework.

Given that our research confirms that increasing numbers of poor people live in situations of conflict and fragility, we regret that the synthesis report did not adequately address the links between development and humanitarian assistance and financing. There is a brief reference to the need to bring them together, but to achieve this we believe that the SDG and financing for development processes need to be better linked with the World Humanitarian Summit process (which is not even mentioned in the synthesis report). Actors on both sides need to be brought together to develop a holistic and coordinated policy framework that contributes to the breakdown of institutional barriers (i.e. looks outside the humanitarian sectors and bring other actors into discussions, and likewise for development actors). Addressing people's vulnerabilities by building their resilience to crises is an opportunity to bridge the gap between development and humanitarian assistance. Whilst a focus on resilience is woven throughout the report, it is not as prominent as it was under the Open Working Group. A focus on supporting resilience as an inherent part of national development financing strategies could have given it prominence in the report.

We share the view expressed in the report that efforts to modernise ODA and measures of development finance should be considered “in an open and transparent forum with the widest possible participation of donor and recipient countries and other relevant stakeholders” (paragraph 99). DI has played a key role in the development of the [International Aid Transparency Initiative \(IATI\)](#), a multi-stakeholder initiative that aims to increase the transparency of development cooperation in order to maximise impact on poverty. IATI has developed an open data standard (the [IATI standard](#)) that is already being used by many different kinds of organisations to publish data on their development cooperation. With further development we believe that the IATI standard could easily be adapted to capture the full range of international development finance, and this is something we are actively promoting within the financing for development process.

With that in mind, we support the report's proposal for an expert technical group to be tasked with developing a coherent framework that accounts for climate finance and ODA. We would be keen to contribute the expertise we have developed through our work on IATI and [our research into climate ODA](#) to this process.

We also support the report's call for levels of concessionality to take into account different development stages, circumstances and multiple dimensions of poverty, and the particular type of investment made (paragraph 100). This is very much in line with our own research on this issue. In advance of the OECD-DAC High Level Meeting this December [we urge all DAC donors to re-examine their ODA loans portfolios](#) and [consider giving loans](#) – especially to those countries with access to few other resources – only when grants would not be preferable.

The report places a welcome emphasis on the need to improve the metrics for measuring progress. We very much agree on the need to develop indicators that go beyond GDP and reflect the multi-dimensional nature of poverty (paragraph 135).

As noted in our earlier press release, the report makes several references to the need for more and better data, including disaggregated data, in order to measure progress. As data revolutionaries, DI strongly supports this call, noting the need for data to be disaggregated at all levels including gender, age, disability and geographic location in order to ensure that no one is left behind. Our concern, however, is that the Data Revolution should not be hijacked for the purpose of monitoring the SDGs. The Data Revolution needs to deliver the right information to the right people at the right time, as we argued in our own [manifesto](#). The people who need this data most of all are decision makers at national and sub-national level, so building both statistical and human capacity at these levels should be the priority of the Data Revolution for sustainable development. Providing data to monitor the SDGs will be a useful by-product of the Data Revolution, but it should not become its primary motivation.

Our initial response to the UNSG's synthesis report was broadly positive. Having had more time to consider it in detail, we remain impressed by its ambition and believe that it sets out a compelling vision for the future of our world, its people and their environment. The challenges ahead will be to translate this vision into clear and concise framework; to mobilise the necessary resources to fund it; and to agree a robust (not burdensome) monitoring and accountability framework at the global level, with appropriate intergovernmental scrutiny and follow-up. It will allow civil society and other stakeholders to fully participate in and stay informed on progress and most importantly to hold their own governments to account. With preparations for the financing for development conference in Addis in July and the UN General Assembly in September already well underway, we urge all member states, private sector and civil society actors to engage constructively in these processes and rise to the challenges set out in the UNSG's synthesis report.

Contact:

Carolyn Culey, Senior Policy Adviser, UK

T: +44 (0) 7786 175037 E: carolyn.culey@devinit.org

Cordelia Lonsdale, Engagement and Communications Officer, US

T: +1 347-430-7006 E: cordelia.lonsdale@devinit.org

www.devinit.org