

Global discussions on what should replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) after they expire in 2015 passed a key milestone over the weekend. Since March 2013 the Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals has held 13 sessions to come up with a proposed set of goals and targets to be delivered to the UN General Assembly (UNGA) for negotiation. On the afternoon of Saturday 19 July, after a final session that lasted 35 hours, OWG members let out a round of relieved and congratulatory applause as the Co-Chairs announced that sufficient agreement existed to bring deliberations to a close. The agreed outcome document, which includes a list of goals and targets, [can be found here](#).

You should also be applauding if you believe that the post-2015 framework should address the violent conflict and insecurity that holds back development. Although the conversation could have gone on **much** longer, the final document includes a sixteenth goal to 'Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.'

The OWG's proposed goals and targets will now become a major input into negotiations on the final framework, to be endorsed at the opening of the 70<sup>th</sup> UNGA in September 2015.

#### **Grounds for optimism...**

There are grounds to be optimistic that this final agreement will include a strong focus on peace. Taking stock, the **UN Secretary-General's 2013 report on post-2015** - and others from **UN agencies**, a **high level panel**, **sustainable development experts** and the **business sector** - have all called for peace to be promoted in the new framework. More than 2 million people, through the **My World survey**, have consistently placed protection against crime and violence and honest and responsive government among their top seven development priorities. With regards to member state positions, the numbers are clearly on the side of peace - notably with 54 African states **making it one of their six pillars**.

Furthermore, few states will be able to reject outright the OWG outcome document given the hard work that has already gone into building consensus; the agenda is more or less set. And the document itself is not bad: the 12 targets under its goal 16 cover most of the key issues which a group of 33 conflict prevention and peacebuilding civil society groups and experts **called for in April**, which the Beyond 2015 global civil society campaign has **also championed**.

#### **...but challenges loom**

On the other hand, making sure that negotiations lead to a framework that is effective in promoting peaceful societies is still going to be extremely challenging.

First, while they agreed to submit the outcome document to the UNGA, a few OWG members emitted lingering grumbles. Contested issues we've seen over the past year - related to inequality, reproductive rights, climate change, means of implementation, common but differentiated responsibilities and, yes, peace - will continue to be discussed next year in pursuit of the final framework. Progress in one area will likely be tied to progress in others.

Second, the targets selected by the OWG are not yet good enough:

- The wording and content of many targets can be improved. One target, for example, calls for a reduction in illicit arms flows. While very welcome, this needs to be extended to include *irresponsible* arms flows as defined by the **UN-agreed Arms Trade Treaty**.
- The inclusion of a target on building capacities to combat terrorism and crime risks promoting coercive approaches which do more harm than good. It should be removed. For similar reasons, it was for the best that a target on security providers' capacity proposed in past drafts was dropped. The framework should focus on outcomes for people, not the outputs of states. However, with this in mind, we still need a target that focuses on how safe people feel and how confident they are in security providers.
- The **evidence suggests** that peace is partly dependent on society's ability to manage conflict peacefully and deepen social cohesion - but none of the OWG's targets effectively promote this.

The problem is that consensus on improving the wording and content of targets while adding new ones is going to be harder to reach with a wider group of countries.

Third, at 17 goals and 169 targets (compared to the MDG's respective eight and 21), the OWG's document is very much a first draft. Crucial peace-related targets will need to be vigorously protected and demonstrated to be priorities as the necessary process of cutting and consolidation occurs.

While it is not yet a transformative vision for development, what the OWG has proposed is a very strong foundation for negotiations to build on. Peace is very much on the agenda. But keeping it there - and making sure it will actually make a difference for people's lives - is still work in progress.

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