

# A rough guide to emerging consensus and divergence in post-2015 goal areas

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## Key messages

A close examination of recent key UN and civil society reports on post-2015 indicates:

- There is strong consensus on the importance of goals in some existing MDG areas such as education, health, gender and poverty, but details on targets and indicators still need to be worked out.
- There is less consensus on other possible goal areas, such as governance, though a great deal of interest in including them in some way. Technical work on how these might be included at the goal or target level could clarify options and break ground on the politics.
- Several goal areas, such as urbanisation or social inclusion, still lack traction at the level of specifics, even though prominent actors frame them as central. Unless the Open Working Group elevates their importance as goals they may only feature as targets in other goals if at all.

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## Level of similarity in approaches to possible post-2015 goal areas

Goal area & Similarity rating	HLP	SDSN	UNGC	UNSG
<b>GOALS FEATURED IN MOST KEY PROPOSALS</b>				
<b>Education</b> ★ ★ ★	Provide Quality Education and Lifelong Learning	Ensure effective learning for all children and youth for life and livelihood	Quality education for all	Provide quality education and lifelong learning.
<b>Gender</b> ★ ★ ★	Empower girls and women and achieve gender equality	Achieve gender equality, social inclusion, and human rights for all	Achieve women and girl's empowerment	Tackle Exclusion and Inequality
<b>Health</b> ★ ★ ★	Ensure Healthy Lives	Achieve Health and Wellbeing at all Ages	Universal health coverage	Improve health
<b>Energy</b> ★ ★ ★	Secure Sustainable Energy	Curb Human-Induced Climate Change and Ensure Clean Energy for All (+ targets within other goals)	Sustainable energy for all	Promote inclusive and sustainable growth and decent employment – <i>Target on sustainable energy</i>
<b>Poverty</b> ★ ★ ★	End Poverty	End poverty and increase prosperity via inclusive economic growth	End poverty and increase prosperity via inclusive economic growth	Eradicate poverty in all its forms
<b>Food Security</b> ★ ★	Ensure food security and good nutrition	(1) End Extreme Poverty including Hunger; (2) Improve Agriculture Systems and Raise Rural Prosperity	Good nutrition for all through sustainable food and agricultural systems	End hunger and malnutrition
<b>Water &amp; Sanitation</b> ★ ★	Achieve Universal Access to Water and Sanitation	Secure Ecosystem Services, Biodiversity and ensure Good Management of Water and other Natural Resources (+ targets within other goals)	Water and sanitation for all	Address environmental challenges
<b>Inclusive Growth &amp; Employment</b> ★ ★	Create Jobs, Sustainable Livelihoods and Equitable Growth	(1) End poverty and increase prosperity via inclusive economic growth; (2) Achieve Development within Planetary Boundaries (target for each country to reach the next income level)	End poverty and increase prosperity via inclusive economic growth	Promote inclusive and sustainable growth and decent employment
<b>Peace &amp; Stability</b> ★ ★	Ensure Stable and Peaceful Societies	Achieve Gender Equality, Social Inclusion, and Human Rights for all (target to 'prevent and eliminate violence against individuals, especially women and children')	Build peaceful and stable societies	Build peace and effective governance based on the rule of law and sound institutions.
<b>Governance</b> ★ ★	Ensure Good Governance and Effective Institutions	Transform Governance for Sustainable Development	Good governance and realization of human rights	Build peace and effective governance based on the rule of law and sound institutions
<b>Environmental Sustainability</b> ★ ★	Manage Natural Resource Assets Sustainably	(1) Achieve Development within Planetary Boundaries; (2) Secure Ecosystem Services, Biodiversity and ensure Good Management of Water and other Natural Resources	<i>Included as cross-cutting issue in other goal areas</i>	(1) Address environmental challenges; (2) Address climate change
<b>Global Enabling Environment</b> ★ ★	Create a Global Enabling Environment and Catalyse Long-Term Finance	Transform Governance for Sustainable Development (targets on global governance & financing)	Good governance and realization of human rights (target on international trading and financial system)	Foster a renewed global partnership

## GOALS FEATURED IN SOME KEY PROPOSALS

<b>Infrastructure &amp; Technology</b> 	(1) Improve agriculture systems and raise rural prosperity (target on 'universal access in rural areas to basic resources and infrastructure services'); (2) Empower inclusive, productive, and resilient cities (target on 'universal access to a secure and affordable built environment and basic urban services')	Modernize infrastructure and technology
<b>Urbanisation</b> 	Empower Inclusive, Productive and Resilient Cities	Meet the challenges of urbanization
<b>Social Inclusion</b> 	Achieve Gender Equality, Social Inclusion and Human Rights for All (target to 'monitor and end discrimination and inequalities in public service delivery, the rule of law, access to justice, and participation in political and economic life')	Tackle exclusion and inequality

### Similarity rating:



*Features at goal level in all key institutional proposals; Similar approach in most policy areas*

*Features at goal level in most key institutional proposals; Similar approach in some policy areas*

*Does not feature at goal level in most key institutional proposals*

### Proposals:

- HLP:** High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2013): *A new global partnership: eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development – the report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda*, New York: UN.
- SDSN:** United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2013): *An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development – Report for the UN Secretary General*, New York: UN
- UNGC:** United Nations Global Compact (2013): *Corporate Sustainability and the United Nations Post-2015 Development Agenda - Perspectives from UN Global Compact Participants on Global Priorities and How to Engage Business Towards Sustainable Development Goals*, New York: UN
- UNSG:** United Nations Secretary General (2013): *A life of dignity for all: accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015 - Report of the Secretary-General*, New York: UN

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# Analysis: consensus and divergence in post-2015 goal areas

In September a legion of UN member states, civil society groups and business representatives descended on New York to attend the 68<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly. Here the anticipated Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Special Event resulted in an [outcome document](#) providing a roadmap on next steps in the process to agree future sustainable development goals. In the year or so leading up to this point there has been unprecedented engagement from governments, civil society, private sector and individuals contributing ideas and proposals on what post-2015 goals should address. Yet there have been few efforts to identify where the emerging areas of consensus and divergence are across the broad range of potential goal areas.

This paper responds to that gap with an analysis of where some of the key institutional proposals and civil society inputs to date come together and where they diverge. It aims to inform those contributing and seeking to influence work in the coming months to define new goals and targets, including that of the Open Working Group due to report its recommendations to the UN Secretary-General ahead of September next year. It offers a comparison of the **key institutional proposals** submitted so far - by the HLP<sup>1</sup>, the SDSN<sup>2</sup>, the UNGC<sup>3</sup> and more recently the UNSG<sup>4</sup> - as well as **major civil society inputs**, including the UN-led global consultations, coalition proposals and some of the latest participatory research on people's priorities. The findings of this study - summarised here and in the table above on approaches to possible goal areas - are based on a detailed analysis of each potential goal area available at [Annex I and II](#). The scores of proposals put forward to date by individual organisations (civil society and others) are not assessed here, however each of these offers an important contribution to the debate and many are reflected in major coalition and consultation-based inputs that were assessed.<sup>5</sup>

We find that the key institutional proposals so far agree on the need to address twelve priorities at goal level. Most of these are already covered in some way by the existing MDGs - *education, health, gender, poverty, food security, environmental sustainability*, and a *global enabling environment* - while some only featured briefly as MDG targets within other goals (*water & sanitation; inclusive growth & employment*). Although all these objectives had a place in the current MDGs, proposals for future goals address most from a different perspective, taking account of MDG lessons, global change and new priorities. There are also some new goal areas - *energy, peace & stability* and *governance* - which are suggested across key proposals but were almost entirely absent from the MDGs. In addition to these twelve themes that the main proposals considered here put forward at goal level, there are further 'outlier' areas being suggested as goals by some of these proposals, including *infrastructure & technology, urbanisation* and *social inclusion*.

Based on an analysis of the similarities and differences in approaches to this set of potential goal areas, we identify three degrees of convergence indicated by star ratings:

- ★★★ *Features at goal level in all key institutional proposals, and proposals take a similar approach in most policy areas*
- ★★ *Features at goal level in most of the key institutional proposals, and proposals take a similar approach in some areas*
- ★ *Does not feature at goal level in most key institutional proposals*

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<sup>1</sup> High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Global Compact

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Secretary-General

<sup>5</sup> Individual organisations' contributions can be consulted at the [Future Goals Tracker](#) database of proposals for post-2015 goals, and are represented in graphs at the Annex reflecting the number of proposals in each specific area.

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**In the first group of themes framed as core post-2015 objectives across proposals (rated three stars) - education, health, gender, energy, and poverty - we find a high degree of convergence in the approaches to goals and targets.** There is still strong consensus on ending **poverty**, which is backed by proposals for getting to zero, leaving no-one behind and alleviating income poverty. There is also agreement amongst the key proposals so far on the need for a new approach that addresses vulnerability to disasters and climate change, in recognition that the impact of these can turn back progress on poverty, and on the need to make progress on both poverty and environment. However, beyond disaster resilience, ideas for concrete targets to address human and environmental development objectives in an integrated way remain limited in most proposals except that of the SDSN.

In **education**, proposals agree on the need to continue to focus on access, but also on a much broader agenda including skills for employment, and lifelong, quality learning. Within this there is an emphasis on literacy and numeracy as indicators of outcomes. In **health**, despite contention around the High Level Panel's exclusion of universal health coverage (UHC) from its suggested targets, UHC is advocated across proposals and also implied in the HLP's report, albeit not as a target. There is also agreement amongst key proposals so far on the need to reduce or end preventable maternal and child mortality; to promote sexual and reproductive health or rights and family planning; to expand immunisation rates; and to reduce or end non-communicable and communicable diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. There is a similarly high level of convergence amongst proposals on **gender**, with agreement on ending violence and discrimination against women and girls; promoting empowerment, equal rights and opportunities; and disaggregating data by gender. And in **energy** there is emerging consensus on a goal for universal access to sustainable energy, with targets to promote renewable energies; to improve energy efficiency; and to transition to clean energies, including by phasing out fossil fuel subsidies.

But despite the strong level of consensus in these goal areas amongst key proposals so far, there is also much that remains to work out in these areas. For instance, there are potentially useful suggestions for targets which do not consistently feature as they haven't gained as much traction as others, which could be due more to omission than a lack of agreement. In education, for example, some point to the need to set targets on gender parity, to improve technology and other facilities in schools, and to bring sustainability concepts into education curricula. In health some highlight the need to address broader contributors to health and wellbeing, for example diet, physical exercise, and mitigating alcohol or substance abuse. In energy there are some ambitious proposals for substantially altering our patterns of energy usage, or suggestions to include a target to finance the transition to green energies in developing economies.

There are also some clear differences in points of view that persist in these apparent areas of consensus. For instance, proposals on poverty still diverge in some important areas, including on whether \$1.25 is an adequate measure of income poverty; or whether the emphasis should be on growth and entrepreneurialism, or prioritising the rights of the poorest to access basic services (or indeed both). Similarly, in health and gender the devil is in the detail, for example in language on sexual and reproductive 'health' or 'rights' - where some remain opposed to the latter. Moreover, tackling things like child marriage, or whether and how the burden of care falls on women, could be extremely significant for poverty and development but still lack traction across key proposals.

In sum, although proposals to date may agree strongly on the 'what' in the above goal areas - i.e. that they are important priorities deserving of a place in a post-2015 framework - there is still a job to do in these areas to agree remaining detail on the 'how', in terms of which specific wording, targets and indicators will make future goals in these areas most useful and effective.

**The second and largest group of potential goals (rated two stars) - food security, water & sanitation, inclusive growth & employment, peace & stability, governance, environmental sustainability, and a global enabling environment - remains more challenging. The key proposals so far still diverge in their approach to many areas, although they agree that these goals should be included.** In some of these there is perhaps simply more to work out rather than any fundamental divergence of approach. On **food security** proposals agree that a future goal should seek to end hunger, malnutrition and stunting, and that more sustainable fishing and food production would support this. However there is a range of areas that civil society actors have identified as important to ensure food security that is largely missing from institutional proposals: self-sufficiency and ownership of the means of food production, rural-urban linkages, employment along food supply chains, and social protection. Similarly, in **water and sanitation**, there is a diverse range of suggestions and approaches: - while most agree on sustainable water management, universal access to drinking water and sanitation, and targets for wastewater management, only some call for the costs of water usage to be borne by all stakeholders; for better governance of water systems management, cross-border flows and infrastructure services; or for more effective funding mechanisms.

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Others in this group of potential goals face both political and technical challenges. While there is agreement amongst proposals on the importance of **environmental sustainability**, there is a lack of consensus about the range of issues and level of ambition that should go under this heading. Some suggested frameworks tackle the natural resource aspects of environmental sustainability under separate goals on energy, water and food, with a broader goal on sustainability as well, while others put most of the sustainability issues under this heading. In addition, moving ideas for goals and targets that effectively integrate poverty and environmental sustainability objectives forward remains a challenge at this stage in two main ways.

**Firstly it is politically difficult:** it blurs the lines on which funding sources would be used for which, with concerns that either could lose out. The politics are toughest however in relation to climate change, where the challenge lies in the debate underway on the thorny question of CBDR - ‘Common but Differentiated Responsibilities’ - or which countries pay most for (or act first on) climate change at the heart of these politics. Climate change has now been identified as the key determinant of whether future progress on poverty will be sustained, so the post-2015 financing landscape will have to take finance for climate action into account and define the relationship. The Climate Change Summit in New York in 2014 and the UNFCCC<sup>6</sup> are the main opportunities to agree action on climate change that supports a post-2015 agenda for development, but doing so will require departing from positions associated with troubled climate negotiations in the past. At this stage it remains unclear to what extent the road to post-2015 development goals and the path to a climate deal will come together, complement or undermine each other. But if it is the latter, there continues to be a risk that climate politics pose a threat to reaching agreement on the post-2015 framework as a whole, or that post-2015 goals fail to define a path for progress on poverty that is sustainable.

**Secondly, there is a technical challenge.** There is a lack of concrete ideas as yet to bring together poverty and environment (and specifically climate change) objectives. This reflects that in spite of growing political support for a merged set of post-2015 goals prioritising these as complementary objectives, there is still neither consensus nor even a clear path being sketched out on how to do this in practice. This technical challenge does not help solve difficult politics, and if policymakers are serious about making mutually reinforcing gains on both poverty and the environment, there is an urgent agenda to spell out what this means and back it up with detailed proposals.

Proposals on environment so far agree on sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems, and some on the need to monitor progress on environmental and social factors along with GDP. Disaster risk and greenhouse gas emissions are also priorities across most proposals. Yet alongside the challenge of limited suggestions that integrate poverty and environment, proposals in this area diverge substantially in their levels of ambition. Some call to legislate against drivers of environmental degradation; for all actors to pay the costs of pollution and use of natural resources; and to live within planetary boundaries including by transforming our patterns of consumption and production. In this vein several call for environmental monitoring and accountability systems, with an emphasis on private sector activities that have environmental impacts. A small minority also point to the role of education in driving social change to support greater sustainability. Others, however, stick to much more limited targets, mainly focused around the agenda of sustainable resources management. Similarly, although all acknowledge the imperative to tackle climate change, civil society frame this as central while most institutional proposals limit the focus of concrete targets to sustainable energy transition.

The other goal area in this set that faces comparable political and technical challenges is that of a **global enabling environment** (the successor to MDG 8 on global partnership). Most targets proposed in this area pose a political challenge, as they touch on the core of incentives driving systems of trade and finance. Because of this any future goal on global partnership would need to be carefully structured to work effectively, whether that means working with or around these incentives. Proposals call for a goal that creates an enabling environment in terms of finance, trade, taxation, aid, strengthened global architecture and partnerships, and supportive, accountable business practices. They agree on the need for long-term financing of future goals, and facilitating economic transformation in lower-income countries through access to intellectual property, innovation and technology. Overall, then, proposals to date in this area address a very similar range of objectives as those addressed by MDG 8 on global partnership – yet this is widely seen to have been one of the least effective goals in practice. It will therefore be essential that new goals do something very different to MDG 8 to ensure that promises for an enabling global environment bear fruit. A good starting point could be defining the specific accountabilities for all actors, and setting up systems that can effectively facilitate these accountabilities in practice.

Some proposed goals within this set are subject to strong debates on the approach. In **inclusive growth and employment**, even though most of the key institutional proposals agree on approaches to promote more sustainable

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<sup>6</sup> [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#)

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and inclusive growth (including on valuing factors beyond GDP, like environment and wellbeing; supporting enterprise development and economic activity; raising productivity and generating more and better jobs), civil society inputs diverge on how best to achieve inclusive growth. They place a stronger focus on equity than on growth in its own right, emphasising employment rights, and highlighting the importance of supporting small, micro, and informal enterprise development, as opposed to growth or enterprise development in general.

Finally, there are those goals within this set which remain politically contentious even though lessons during the MDGs reflect that they can have a positive or negative influence on development outcomes, whether in their own right or for outcomes in other areas. **Peace & stability** and **governance** appear as goal areas across the key proposals, and this in itself signals a step-change in development thinking since the MDGs were agreed, where aspects of these agendas were relegated to the preamble rather than goals and targets. There is now apparent consensus amongst some of the main proposals to date in many aspects of these agendas. In governance, they agree on the need for transparency and accountability, strong institutions, and on fighting corruption. Most also propose targets on civil and political or human rights. In peace & stability there is growing consensus around reducing or eliminating violence, particularly against women and children; on the link between peace and development; and that economic inclusion, addressing inequalities and ensuring access for all groups to public services can strengthen these links. There is also agreement on the importance of rule of law and effective, inclusive institutions. Proposals suggest that this requires making institutions of justice and security fair, non-discriminatory and accessible to all groups.

Yet in spite of quite a high degree of consensus building around what priorities would be useful in these areas, it is far from guaranteed that they will survive intergovernmental negotiations and appear as goals in a post-2015 framework. For one they have not been part of the MDGs or traditional aspects of the development agenda in many contexts, but more importantly, some still perceive them to touch too closely on matters of domestic politics and sovereignty to address at global level. Adding to the political challenge here is the fact that key proposals also diverge in their approach to some potential target areas. For example, in peace and security only some address drivers of conflict, such as the flow of arms or land rights, and in governance there is divergence on whether to focus more narrowly on civil and political rights or also on the wider agenda of economic, social and cultural rights. Moreover, any proposals on governance cannot avoid contending with the argument that there are not enough quantitatively measurable facets to this agenda, for example as noted in the interim report of the Open Working Group, and proposals demonstrating the contrary have yet to be put forward.

**The third group of possible goal areas (rated one star) - *infrastructure & technology, urbanisation, social inclusion* - are not suggested as goals by most key proposals to date, and are unlikely to find a place at goal level in a future framework, although they may feature as targets within other goals.** These outlying themes are addressed in different ways by different actors, and only one or two of the key institutional proposals suggest they should be included as goals in a new framework. They could still gain traction, however, in the coming period of work by the Open Working Group, and some make a strong case for their inclusion at goal level.

For instance, proposals for a goal on **social inclusion** to address social and economic inequities – mainly coming from the SDSN and civil society inputs – highlight the importance of strengthening economic and political participation, ensuring access for all groups to legal and public services, and ending discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, disability, geographic location or other groupings. Proposals in this area also call for data disaggregation to monitor progress against all post-2015 goals by gendered and group-based inequalities. It has been controversial that the HLP and other actors tasked with taking the post-2015 agenda forward have not proposed a goal to address inequalities, especially given that evidence indicates inequality has undermined MDG progress and could similarly hold back progress on a future agenda for development. In addition to targets on income inequality (suggested by some key proposals within a poverty or inclusive growth goal), there is therefore a strong case to address the wider aspects of inequality beyond incomes that a goal on social inclusion could encompass.

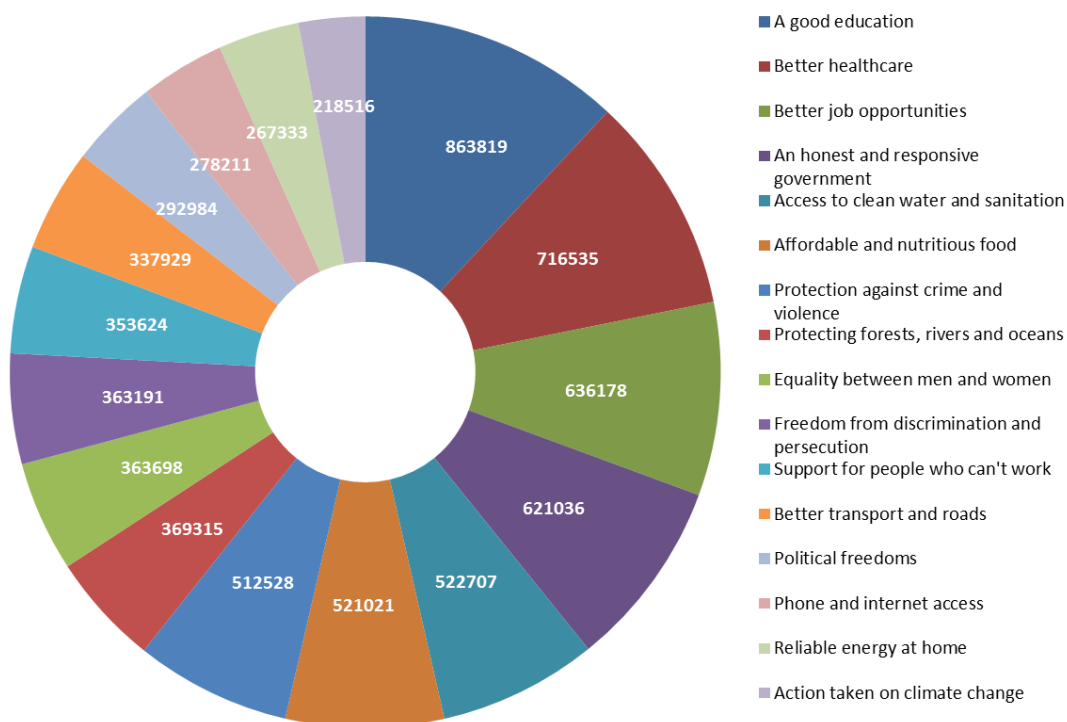
Even if there is no specific goal on social inclusion to address the wider inequality agenda, however, group-based inequities are likely to be addressed through disaggregated approaches to measuring outcomes for the poorest in other goal areas. They could also be addressed through relevant targets in other goal areas, as could the remaining outlying areas of **infrastructure and technology** and **urbanisation**, and others not covered in this report where there has been significant policy interest, like **migration** and **population**.

Comparing the areas of consensus between key proposals so far with recent results from *My World* (the UN's global survey on people's priorities for future goals) reflects that the priorities most voted for by people around the world are also areas that key proposals agree should feature as goals and where there is significant overlap in approaches to targets. It is telling that *an honest and responsive government*, for example, features within the four top priorities for



voters, along with *education, healthcare and better job opportunities*, all of which have garnered over 600 000 votes to date:

**My World votes across goal areas**



This indicates that people’s priorities also reflect global changes and new priorities that aren’t part of the current MDG agenda, including jobs and governance. It will be important that those taking forward work to define the post-2015 framework in the coming period seek to ensure that such areas remain on the agenda, even in cases where the politics is a challenge.

However post-2015 goals take shape, there is already a clear consensus emerging that a much more ambitious and comprehensive agenda is called for than the MDG framework offered. New areas are appearing across key proposals that didn’t feature in the MDGs, and the bar of ambition is being raised in those areas that did. This points firmly to the question of financing a future agenda, which proposals agree will need to be a strongly collective effort involving more actors more substantially than in the past. This means a strengthened role for governments in raising more of their own development resources, and for private sector finance to be mobilised at scale, even if ODA continues to play the defining role for some countries.

The importance of the civil society contribution through post-2015 proposals and other inputs is also highlighted by this review. Civil society has offered valuable ideas so far that are sometimes missing from the proposals of institutions or expert groups, in areas like social inclusion (where most institutional proposals have focused more narrowly on incomes), governance and accountability, and a global enabling environment. It is no coincidence that these areas are among the most politically difficult, and it is therefore essential that civil society continues to be given space to help shape an ambitious framework in the coming phase of intergovernmental work and negotiations.

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# Conclusion

Many of the same priorities as those covered by the MDGs, like ending poverty and providing essential public services, are also top priorities for the emerging post-2015 framework. In these areas there is lots of consensus on the approach to goals and targets, even where this involves addressing them in new ways. In spite of this there remains work to be done towards agreeing detail on the range of targets and indicators, and resolving persisting differences in some areas.

Goals in which there is less agreement so far face both political and technical challenges. These are broadly associated with their status as new goals not addressed in the MDG agenda, where there is consequently a more limited technical and political precedent through which to address them in a new framework. The present challenge in these areas is to break new ground on both fronts – for goals that are most controversial a crucial step will be ensuring that there are robust technical proposals available to help break ground on the politics. Recent *My World* survey results reflect that including some politically difficult areas like governance in a new framework will also be important to answer to people's main priorities.

In areas that are not new but in which the MDGs weren't effective, like global partnership, it will be essential that new approaches go further or work differently to avoid repeating poor results. And for possible goals where there is even less consensus on the approach across key proposals to date, or even on their inclusion in new goals, priorities could still be carried through to the final framework as targets in other goals, or in the approach to measuring future progress. Moreover, there is still scope for the report of the Open Working Group to elevate their prominence in the coming months.

This paper presents a rough guide on the state of consensus and divergence in proposals on future goals so far, but it is possible that a very different picture will emerge as the post-2015 process enters the intergovernmental negotiations phase next year. At that stage there will inevitably be less space for the range of actors to influence the outcome, which makes the period from now up to the UN Secretary-General's report in a year's time a crucial window of opportunity. In the immediate period there is also scope for the state of consensus and divergence to go in new directions, as many of the potential goal areas analysed here are yet to be discussed by the Open Working Group. As this group comes together this month to resume its schedule of meetings, it would do well to take account of the wealth of ideas already on the table.

**To access the goal-specific analysis on which this summary is based please refer to [Annex I: Goals featured in most key proposals](#) and [Annex II: Goals featured in some key proposals](#).**

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