



*Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.*




United Nations Development Programme

# FROM THE MDGs TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL

LESSONS FROM 15 YEARS OF PRACTICE





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UNDP partners with people at all levels of society to help build nations that can withstand crisis, and drive and sustain the kind of growth that improves the quality of life for everyone. On the ground in more than 170 countries and territories, we offer global perspective and local insight to help empower lives and build resilient nations.

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**United Nations Development Programme**



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Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon speaks at the Global Citizen Festival in New York's Central Park on the second day of the UN Sustainable Development Summit 2015, at which world leaders adopted the SDGs. UN PHOTO/ESKINDER DEBEBE

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This Report was prepared by a core team of UNDP's Development Planning and Inclusive Sustainable Growth Group comprising Babatunde Omilola (Team Leader), Sarah Renner, Almudena Fernandez and Devika Iyer. The production of the Report was carried out under the overall direction of Nik Sekhran, Director and Chief of Profession for Sustainable Development and Magdy Martinez-Soliman, UN Assistant Secretary General, UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director of the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support.

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# FOREWORD

Humanity continues to face an overwhelming array of challenges from rising inequalities and entrenched poverty to stubborn conflicts, contagious diseases, climate change and rapid environmental degradation. Inadequate responses have left us all more vulnerable. The consequences are felt most acutely by those with fewer assets and capabilities: those most dependent on ecosystems and least able to exercise their rights to human security, development, voice and dignity.

Against this backdrop, two achievements stand out as a reason for hope. In September 2015, UN Member States unanimously adopted an ambitious new development agenda, *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (Agenda 2030) establishing 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by *all* countries and stakeholders by 2030. Two months later in Paris, 195 countries, meeting as parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), reached agreement on the world's first universal climate deal. Both agreements reflect the will of leaders and people everywhere to improve lives and the prospects of the planet we share.

Action now needs to match the scale of our commitments. As this Report is written, the outlook is encouraging. The Paris Climate Agreement was ratified and about to go into force and countries, North and South, had taken early steps to implement the SDGs. This Report argues that there is no need to start from scratch.

The quest of the last 15 years to achieve eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) demonstrates the power of Global Goals to realize progressive change. The MDGs played a role in lifting more than one billion people from extreme poverty; significantly reducing the number of people suffering hunger, preventable death and illness; and enabling unprecedented numbers of girls and boys to attend school. The countdown to clear and measurable targets heightened solidarity, focused minds and engaged leaders and people in problem-solving.

The MDGs succeeded, in part, by tapping a widely held conviction that progress everywhere – particularly among the impoverished – enriches us all; not only because it drives peace and prosperity, but also because it is the right thing to do. Today's challenge is to revive this shared conviction and use it to drive the leaps in progress we need to build a better future.

This Report strives to illuminate *how* in practice, the SDGs can best be applied to this end. It draws from the lessons in over 50 recent National MDG Reports,<sup>1</sup> written by governments and stakeholders directly involved in the MDGs, and in many cases –transitioning to the SDGs. Its recommendations are informed by UNDP's experience, supporting more than 140 countries to realize the MDGs. UNDP saw, first hand, what made the MDGs effective and was increasingly able to help its partners employ Global Goals to:

- Build national consensus for locally important, progressive change;
- Enable poor and disadvantaged communities to be heard and responded to;

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1. As of April 2016, 55 countries had produced National MDG Reports in 2013 or later.



- Attract international support, build partnerships and coalitions for change;
- Call attention to inequalities and other underlying constraints to progress;
- Learn from practice and adapt initiatives until they worked;
- Finance and develop catalytic initiatives that advanced multiple goals.

The first steps were vital. Where early and effective MDG efforts made Global Goals locally meaningful, leaders were more likely to make bold changes; business, community groups and people were more likely to contribute; and international partners were more likely to provide robust, sustained support. The results improved lives, leading in some cases, to remarkable leaps in human development.

The gap between the ambitions of the world's new global development agenda and collective action to date, leaves many doubtful about the SDGs' prospects. This is not the first time, however, that the world strives to achieve broad Global Goals against the odds. The lessons of the MDGs suggest an opportunity to get the SDGs right from the outset and thus, realize faster, bolder progress. This is why this Report is important: it suggests how, concretely, the SDGs might drive transformative change.

Thanks to UN-led consultations and outreach, the SDGs benefit from more and earlier popular engagement than did the MDGs. Over 10 million people, experts and leaders shared their priorities for the SDG agenda. The hope is that this global constituency for change, coupled with improvements in practice, some of which are recommended in this Report, can enable more effective implementation.

We encourage practitioners, advocates and leaders, in all walks of life, to use this Report to identify and apply lessons from MDG practice, suited to their context. The stakes could not be higher. The world cannot afford to miss this opportunity to eliminate poverty and needless suffering, improve lives and secure the prospects of the planet on which we all depend.

**Magdy Martinez-Soliman**

United Nations Assistant Secretary-General

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