

Pacific Consultation on Progress on the Millennium Development Goals and the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Final report

I. Introduction and background

UNDP, ADB and ESCAP in cooperation with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat organized a Pacific consultation on progress on the MDGs and the post-2015 development agenda in Suva, Fiji from 17-19 November 2014. Government officials, civil society and development partners attended the consultation representing 14 Pacific Island Countries (PICs).

The Suva workshop was the second one dedicated specifically to the Pacific. It is part of a series of regional and sub-regional workshops and consultations on the MDGs and post-2015 development agenda in Asia-Pacific led by the ESCAP/ADB/UNDP regional partnership. The latest consultations will feed into the next ESCAP/ADB/UNDP Asia Pacific Regional MDG Report (2014/15) on the Means of Implementation.

Recognizing that the international community is at the threshold of finalizing an ambitious new post-2015 development agenda, the consultation has two broad aims: 1) To take stock of progress towards the MDGs in the Pacific, including successes and challenges; 2) To explore how the future development agenda that will succeed the MDGs can best meet the needs and aspirations of the PICs and people of the region.

II. Current status and key issues in achieving the MDGs

While much progress has been made in the Pacific on some of the MDGs, for example on infant and maternal mortality, and education, challenges remain, particularly in progress towards more inclusive sustainable human development. Inequality and exclusion are on the rise in the Pacific. Vulnerability, for example to economic shocks and natural disasters, has a great impact on national progress against the MDGs and human well-being in general.

An understanding of the limitations in achievement of the MDG can be gained by examining data and reports on the MDGs such as the PIFS Pacific Regional MDGs Tracking Report, as well as those Reports beyond the MDG, such as the UNDP State of Human Development in the Pacific (2014); ESCAP Economic and Social Survey of Asia and Pacific (2014); and the Pacific complementary report to the World Bank's 2014 World Development Report. All of these reports suggest that issues of inequality, exclusion, hardship and vulnerability need to be taken into consideration when considering progress on the MDGs in the Pacific. For example, 25% of people in the Pacific still live below their national poverty line and over 20% of people are living in hardship. There are particular concerns as well on NCDs and violence against women. Gender equality was particularly flagged by Cook Islands, which found that women headed households are still more vulnerable to poverty and men still outnumber women in senior level positions and

in full-time employment. NCDs and its impact on household and government budgets were illustrated by Tonga.

Common challenges in making progress against the MDGs faced by countries include human and institutional capacity constraints, lack of ownership and political will, lack of awareness and engagement of stakeholders and the challenge of localizing the MDGs, lack of alignment with global and regional actions, insufficient resources and capacities of resource implementation, lack of baseline data and capacities to collect and analyse data, etc. It was also noted that some MDG indicators were not relevant for Pacific Islands or unmeasurable. In addition, more efforts are needed to strengthen development partner coordination and to strengthen aid effectiveness tracking.

From these challenges, lessons can be drawn to inform the post-2015 agenda. Such lesson include: early and wide consultations to raise understanding and commitment; attention to proper planning and budgeting and the use of budget support for SDG implementation; capacity building and successive planning; using simple language; building and sustaining capacity in data collection/analyses and utilization; attention to the basics such as infrastructure and social services; properly analysing aspects of growth – inclusivity, vulnerable groups in society, social protection, etc.

A specific lesson from the MDGs in the Pacific is the need to not only address the symptoms but rather the root causes of structural inequalities underpinning poor development. To do so may require an alternative model of development other than a conventional “growth” model, to one that puts the humans at the centre and is linked to justice. This may also be facilitated by reconnecting with values expressed in the Millennium Declaration.

Specific points were raised about the means of implementation. In the Pacific there was limited direct funding to countries to achieve MDG targets and global and regional funding mechanisms were not easy to access. Coordination of donor support was also lacking. On the technology side the relevance and sustainability (such as maintenance costs) of technology were obstacles in their role as contributor to MDG achievement. Capacities, including statistical capacities, have been stretched and further tailoring of capacity building initiatives to the national level is needed. Finally, for trade the cost of compliance versus the benefits received from trade agreements was questioned for the Pacific.

III. The new post-2015 agenda

While these lessons from MDG implementation in the Pacific remain relevant, the post-2015 agenda will constitute a much more comprehensive and integrated agenda. If anything, the SDGs are universal and will apply to all countries, regardless of the level of development

PNG, Nauru and Palau played an active role in the intergovernmental Open Working Group that designed the SDGs, in particular advocating for a stand-alone goal on Oceans (proposed SDG14).

With 17 goals and 169 associated targets, participants expressed concern over the breadth and complexity of the goals and targets, noting the challenge is to identify priorities and make the post-2015 agenda achievable for Pacific countries. Ownership and national leadership will be critical. Given the level of aspiration of the new goals, making the best use of resources for development – from all sources – will be vital to ensure further progress for all people of the region.

Key Pacific regional strategies have been linked to global declarations over the past decade—and this approach has continued with the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway. In addition, the Pacific region already has a number of existing mechanisms and frameworks that are linked to the SDGs that can facilitate implementation, particularly the Framework for Pacific Regionalism and the Forum Compact on Strengthening Development Coordination.

The SDGs have been constructed as an integrated approach, as sustainable development interventions cannot be put in an economic, social and/or environmental box. Examples of nexus issues are water and energy, which are particularly difficult to delineate as environmental, social or economic issues. Both link to health, food security, industry, agricultural production and environmental health with ‘access’ being more of a social issue.

For the implementation of the SDGs, there are unique regional and national contexts which need to be taken into account. The Pacific has not only unique structural challenges with respect to economic development, but also a unique environment, culture and social context. The need to contextualize the goals in the regional, sub-regional and national context was therefore highlighted.

The Pacific region faces particular challenges in the context of climate change, and as such, SDG13 on climate change is important for all of the other SDGs. Climate change links to vulnerability and opportunities. Climate change in the Pacific is not only about sea level rise, but about rainfall and fresh water, oceans and disasters.

Contextualizing is also important for creating ownership, which was marked as one of the key elements for performance against the SDGs. Without national ownership and political will, progress against the SDGs is less likely, as was one of the lessons from the MDGs. Ownership at the local level is also important, and pro-active efforts will need to be made to raise awareness and “localize” the new agenda. Inclusive, equitable and sustainable development cannot occur without a participatory approach involving local government, private sector and civil society. Collaboration and partnerships are essential, including at the local level.

Contextualizing also means alignment with national development plans and strategies, as well as with regional activities. It should also include the coordination of country resources and donor assistance.

It was noted that capacities of the region to deliver on the SDGs are inadequate to meet the level of ambition. Building on existing work related to SDGs activities will therefore be essential. There

is no need to “start from scratch” in building capacities to address the post-2015 development agenda. Work done towards the MDGs and other national development planning processes, coupled with the human rights based approach to development provides a significant foundation. “Use what we have, and enhance what we have.”

IV. Means of Implementation

Finance

Sustainable development cannot be considered without considering financing. Financing is not only about ODA, but also about communications, energy, trade, remittances, private sector, revenue from natural resources, climate change adaptation funds and private savings. Financing is also about fostering commitment at the national, community and individual level to invest in the future.

For the region it will be important to rearticulate development finance in a changed development landscape and move towards a financing framework that includes public and private, domestic and international sources of financing. There is declining availability of ODA but there are other sustainable sources of development finance such as government revenues, including sovereign wealth funds and private sources.

Financing needs are huge with the more ambitious agenda and there are global public and private funds that can be made available for use. However, current financing and investment patterns would not deliver sustainable development – investment returns on sustainable development are not as attractive as other opportunities and governments are unable to mobilize adequate financing to undertake public investments. In the Pacific, and elsewhere, there is a need to consider aligning private incentives with goals for the public good to direct private finance to sustainable development investments through policy and regulatory environment.

For the new agenda there will be competition between goals for resources. While the financial means are there globally, the availability of domestic fiscal resources in Pacific Islands is severely constrained: there is limited scope to increase tax revenue because of narrow economic base, weak tax governance, and very small if not the total absence of the private sector. Therefore, for most Pacific SIDS, ODA will remain important necessitating the importance of strengthening development and aid effectiveness.

The role of the private sector as an engine for growth and leveraging was highlighted. However, how to engage small, medium and large enterprises has not been approached systematically. Private sector development should be promoted but the context of each country needs to be taken into account. Clear oversight and regulatory function must be there: the interest for common good vis-a-vis private incentives must be ensured at the outset of any public-private partnership contracts.

Trade and technology

Trade and technology can be important enablers for development. They were recognized as such for the MDGs and both included under MDG 8 on the global partnership for development, although to a limited extent. MDG 8 is probably also one of the most criticized for its lack of measurability and accountability. It was created as an enabler for the achievement of the other goals, but didn't live up to expectations.

The trade and technology targets included in the SDGs are of varying degree of relevance for the Pacific. For example, in the past decade, the failure to reap the gains from trade are mainly due to supply, rather than demand and a solution would be to move up the value added chain rather than to increase the overall volume of exports. In addition, the cost of compliance for free trade agreements is often higher than the benefits for Pacific Islands.

Although access to technology seemed to have increased overall (especially mobile phone technology), there remain a lot of issues to technology transfer and usage. For example, there is little in-country capacity to maintain and repair new technologies or to even assess their relevance and suitability for the country's needs. It was suggested in order to increase capacities, technical training needs to be brought to the country, rather than the country sending its people abroad. Potential was also noted for the regional level to tackle some of the trade and technology challenges.

Statistics

Sustainable development requires integrated planning, management and monitoring across sectors. Many of the individual goals will require cooperation of a wide spectrum of ministries and stakeholders. Monitoring of the SDGs will also not only need to involve the national statistical offices, but the whole national statistical system, in particular line ministries.

Countries expressed concerns about the statistical capacities needed to monitor the SDGs. Monitoring and reporting on the MDGs was already a challenge for many. Disaggregation and quality of data were some of the issues encountered. Currently, there are inadequate investments and financial resources for national statistical systems - essential elements to acquire the tools for

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