

Eradicating poverty through environmentally resilient development

The way forward post-2015

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Only through truly resilient development that considers our changing environment and the limits to our resources will it be possible to tackle the root causes of poverty and inequality in the long term, ensuring poverty eradication for current and future generations. The post-2015 development framework provides an opportunity to ensure that all countries are set on a development path that guarantees a sustainable future for all.

Climate change and related disasters present huge risks to sustainable development and poverty eradication, especially for the world's poorest, many of whom are dependent on the natural environment for their survival. While there has been progress since the Millennium Development Goals were agreed, in many countries economic growth has not been inclusive or equitable, failing to eradicate poverty and undermining the natural environment.

Any newly agreed goals must now take a different, more resilient path: one which makes all nations better prepared to manage risks, enables them to eradicate poverty, makes them more resource efficient and secure, reduces their dependence on outside help and makes the best use of money for development investments.

To achieve this outcome we propose that the post-2015 framework needs to address four environmental resilience tests, outlined in detail on page 10. In brief, they are:

1. Support environmentally resilient poverty reduction.
2. Deliver resource efficiency and security.
3. Enable access to sustainable, secure, clean energy for all.
4. Reduce vulnerability to and the impact of disasters.

This holistic post-2015 framework must apply to both developed and developing countries, enabling all nations to live within the planetary and social boundaries which are essential to long term global sustainability.

Millennium Development Goals and the post-2015 framework

“By putting environmental sustainability at the heart of a new approach to development there will be benefits not only to the world’s poorest people but for all countries.”

The UN’s post-2015 development framework process aims to replace the existing set of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and their 2015 targets, established at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000, to reduce extreme poverty and meet the needs of the world’s poorest people. Despite progress on a number of the goals, a new framework will be needed once the MDGs expire. The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has appointed a High-level Panel to advise what a post-2015 development framework should look like. At the same time, an Open Working Group is discussing the creation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a process agreed at the Rio+20 sustainable development conference in 2012, to build on the MDGs and, hopefully, converge with the post-2015 development agenda.

Although MDG7 was given the title ‘environmental sustainability’, sustainable development does not feature strongly enough in the MDGs and nor do the MDGs respond to the challenge of climate change. The post-MDG and SDG processes provide an opportunity to establish a new approach to development, one which tackles the root causes of poverty and inequality and aims to eradicate poverty in our lifetime, for current and future generations. By putting environmental sustainability at the heart of a new approach to development there will be benefits not only to the world’s poorest people but for all countries. This significant outcome will be strengthened by the two separate UN processes for post-MDGs and SDGs coming together. This approach is supported by the UN task team in their report to the secretary-general, *Realising the future we want for all*, in which they call for a more holistic approach post-2015, with environmental sustainability as one of four key dimensions in the new framework.¹

Development must prepare nations for future pressures on essential resources such as food, water and energy, and for changes to the climate. Addressing new and unpredictable extreme weather events and the uncertain impact on resources requires a different focus. In the past, progress towards development has too often favoured unsustainable growth, for example through investment in inappropriate infrastructure which can lock developing nations into unsustainable development pathways, exacerbating inequalities and limiting long term growth. In turn, this is likely to present risks to others, including developed economies, their supply chains and national security.

By following a development path underpinned by environmental resilience, nations will:

- be better placed to manage risks to their economies and the lives and livelihoods of their citizens, including those that are climate-related;
- be in a stronger position to eradicate poverty for the long term;
- be more resource efficient and secure, including through deploying new technologies such as renewable energy;
- reduce dependence on outside help; and
- maximise value for money of development investments.

Long term vs short term development: the current trend

“As well as taking lives, climate change threatens development investments, hinders economic growth and puts poorer countries at risk of becoming more dependent on aid.”

Global efforts to eradicate poverty will be undermined if we fail to address environmental crises such as climate change and biodiversity loss. International support is increasingly needed to respond to the impact and associated costs of climate change and related disasters – including hurricanes, floods and drought – on vulnerable communities. For example, Ethiopia lost US\$1.1 billion to drought annually between 1997 and 2007, receiving on average US\$1.3 billion per year in international assistance during the same period.²

As well as taking lives, climate change threatens development investments, hinders economic growth and puts poorer countries at risk of becoming more dependent on aid. It compounds and interacts with other risks, such as poor governance, conflict or market failures, to increase poor people’s vulnerability and intensify development challenges. Moreover, the longer we delay action on climate change, the challenges will be greater and the costs higher for all countries.

Economic growth has, in many countries, not been inclusive or equitable, failing to eradicate poverty and undermining the natural environment on which future survival and prosperity depend. Worldwide, 1.3 billion people are still without access to electricity, 783 million are without access to safe water and 2.5 billion lack basic sanitation.³ The OECD has estimated that, by 2030, nearly half of the world’s population (3.9 billion people) will be living under conditions of severe water stress.⁴

Poor people often depend directly on the natural environment for their livelihoods, for example for food, water, income and building materials, making them the most vulnerable to environmental degradation and climate change impacts. Natural resources are best able to support livelihoods when they are healthy, diverse and resilient. Therefore, protecting ecosystems and biodiversity is central to building the resilience of the world’s poorest people, in both rural and urban areas, and to ensuring the provision of clean water, productive soils for food, and protection from natural hazards.

“In Bolivia in recent years, the consequences of global warming have been unmistakable – more extreme weather events, retreating glaciers, among others – and now it should lead to the necessary consideration of resilient development.”

Agua Sustentable, Bolivia

The way forward: environmentally resilient development

“Reducing vulnerability to known threats and uncertainties requires a more holistic approach.”

Economic and social development must now take a different path. We need an approach that ensures the long term resilience of the natural environment and the sustainable and equitable use of resources. Such development should enable countries to manage risk and respond effectively when challenges emerge. Reducing vulnerability to known threats and uncertainties requires a more holistic approach to managing risks in development planning, peace-building and humanitarian responses.⁵

An environmentally resilient approach will make it possible to end absolute poverty in a lifetime, protecting both current and future generations and reducing vulnerability to climate change in the long term.

To achieve this, the post-2015 framework needs to address four environmental resilience tests, outlined fully on page 10 and also exemplified in the four case studies shown. In brief, they are:

1. Support environmentally resilient poverty reduction.
2. Deliver resource efficiency and security.
3. Enable access to sustainable, secure, clean energy for all.
4. Reduce vulnerability to, and the impact of, disasters.

What does environmentally resilient development look like?

- improved local food systems that are more diverse and flexible, bringing food security and less hunger;
- decentralised renewable energy, such as for clinics, schools, businesses and communities;
- built-in disaster preparedness and risk reduction, greatly reducing the need for humanitarian aid;
- resource security and efficiency, leading to an efficient, more equitable economy shared by all, contributing to both economic resilience and absolute poverty eradication;
- good stewardship of ecosystems and biodiversity, supporting the livelihoods and poverty reduction of the people that depend on them, and providing the basis for ecosystem services into the future; and
- absolute poverty brought to an end in an equitable way, for current and future generations.

“If vulnerable people are not supported to build their resilience now, it’s going to be very difficult and expensive to try and build it later.”

Sophie Makoloma, Christian Aid, Malawi

The four tests in action

1. Support environmentally resilient poverty reduction



Christian Aid / Amanda Farant

Supporting small scale farming

About 85 per cent of the world's farmers are smallholders who cultivate plots of land no bigger than two hectares. It is these small farms that produce the largest amounts (over 50 per cent) of food globally and cultivate around 60 per cent of arable land worldwide.⁶ In developing countries organic systems produce up to 80 per cent more than non-organic farms.⁷

Action

Agro-ecological farming in Cambodia⁸

For Cambodian farmers, increasing unpredictability of rainfall is contributing to more frequent agricultural droughts. In response, NGOs in Cambodia, some working together in a programme funded by the European Commission, have been working with communities to develop drought-resilient agricultural techniques accessible to poor farmers. This has helped to reduce climate risks, increase yields and diversify food production. The techniques are based on local knowledge, use locally available materials and Cambodian innovations, and minimise labour costs. They include:

- integrated farming, where by-products of chicken and fish rearing provide organic fertilisers for vegetable production;
- enhancement of aquatic food species (fish, crabs, snails) that naturally live in flooded rice fields;
- drip irrigation, using cheap and locally produced materials, water harvested by traditional methods and innovations in mulching to retain soil moisture; and
- the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) and other innovations in rice production, to minimise external inputs, reduce vulnerability to drought and enhance yields.

“All nations have a responsibility to ensure that we don’t continue to exceed the environmental limits of the planet.”

Shared responsibilities for resilient development

Global environmental challenges necessitate a global, ambitious and unifying post-2015 framework that drives sustainable development at all levels, for the benefit of those living in poverty as well as richer nations. Already three planetary boundaries, as originally described by Rockström et al in 2009, have been transgressed: climate change, the rate of biodiversity loss and the rate of interference with the nitrogen cycle.⁹ All nations have a responsibility to ensure that we do not continue to exceed the environmental limits of the planet.

There is an urgent need to move to a political and economic system where aid is used in a more collaborative way, one that ultimately enables countries to find a route out of aid dependence; for example, through more equal and sustainable partnerships between countries, the private sector and civil society, increased domestic resources for development and greater equity in the resulting benefits to communities.

Sustainable partnerships can help to ensure that development resources (whether aid, domestic or private investment) are used efficiently and effectively. Developed nations and companies can act responsibly together in securing resources around the world, with aid enabling countries to support national development plans and investment. These partnerships work for the benefit of both poorer and richer nations. There are clear long term gains for all economies to become resource efficient, working towards a resilient global economy and ensuring all nations are best equipped to manage future shocks to resource security and supply chains.

Richer nations also need to lead the way with their own resource management, with resource efficiency models that can be replicated elsewhere, and by ensuring their own consumption does not undermine the development of others. This approach can provide the necessary enabling environment for poorer countries to develop in a sustainable and resilient way, as well as reducing the risks all countries face from resource scarcities, conflict and unequal consumption. In the UK, for instance, the Climate Change Act and Energy Bill are intended to prepare the country for a new era of energy management. As well as getting this right at home, richer nations can also work to ensure their partners in the developing world are ready and able to leapfrog to low carbon, resilient economic development.

“The strategies to face climate change must link up to development plans. In the future we have to promote new lifestyles and alternative forms of production, distribution and consumption in the context of climate change.”

El Movimiento Ciudadano frente al Cambio Climático (MOCICC), Peru

The four tests in action

2. Deliver resource efficiency and security



Christian Aid / Rachel Stevens

Preventing deforestation and protecting forest peoples

Globally, up to 17 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions come from deforestation, and around 13 million hectares of forest are lost every year.¹⁰ Deforestation is driven by growing demand for pulp, paper and agricultural produce. Tropical rainforests and peatlands in South-East Asia and the Congo Basin are being destroyed to make way for oil palm plantations, while the Amazon biome has been threatened by deforestation linked to timber, beef and soy production.

Action

The UK's International Climate Fund

The UK has committed to provide up to £300 million to tackle deforestation through its £2.9 billion International Climate Fund (ICF). A key objective is to address the economic and commercial drivers of deforestation, transform the supply chains of the commodities that put pressure on the forest and ensure compliance by improving the monitoring and reporting of commitments for sustainable sourcing and production.

The ICF funds schemes that minimise the impact of agricultural commodities on forest land by supporting the sustainable intensification of agriculture and encouraging conversion of brownfield and degraded land instead of intact forest landscapes. It also supports projects to improve forest governance and clarify land tenure, to reduce illegal logging and to recognise the rights of indigenous peoples.

The four tests in action

3. Enable access to sustainable, secure, clean energy for all



Energy access using wind pumps

About a third of the world lives in energy poverty, 1.3 billion people have no electricity, and 2.6 billion cook on open fires.¹¹ According to the International Energy Agency, for there to be universal access at least 55 per cent of all new electricity generating capacity will have to come from decentralised sources such as mini-grids or isolated units.¹²

This lack of access limits enterprise development, access to fresh water, education and health services. An estimated one billion people in the world are served by health facilities that are completely without electricity, affecting infant mortality rates and access to basic vaccines which need constant refrigeration.¹³

Action

The Davsam wind pump project¹⁴

The Davsam wind pump project installed more than 80 locally manufactured wind pumps in arid and semi-arid areas in Kenya. The increased access to energy using wind power has improved the supply of domestic water, irrigation and all year round farming. This is an alternative to diesel pumps, which are still common in eastern and north-eastern parts of the country, but are prone to irregular supply and high cost. The use of wind pumps for water access and irrigation is now increasing due to the frequent droughts experienced in the country.

The four tests in action

4. Reduce vulnerability to and the impact of disasters



Christian Aid/Sian Curry

Avoiding human and financial disasters

The incidence of natural disasters has increased fivefold since the 1970s, in part due to climate change induced by human activity.¹⁵ In 2010 the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters recorded 373 natural disaster events that killed over 296,800 people, affected the lives of 208 million people and cost nearly US\$110 billion.¹⁶ Pre-emptive disaster risk reduction (DRR) measures can avert the loss of lives and income.

Action

Disaster resilient communities in Honduras

In Honduras, 62 per cent of the population lives in poverty and 42 per cent in extreme poverty. Many poor communities live on slopes or flood plains, making them vulnerable to climate-related and other natural hazards including floods, hurricanes or earthquakes, such as the devastation caused by Hurricane Mitch.

The community based organisation ASONOG worked with the UK Department for International Development funded 'Building disaster resilient communities' programme to re-energise national structures for DRR and develop a new DRR law for the country. It includes a budget increase that municipalities now have to allocate to such measures, which translates into infrastructure protection, training in preparedness and risk mitigation, and the organisation of communities and municipal teams to respond according to a set plan in the event of a disaster.

The four environmental resilience tests for the post-2015 development framework

A resilient approach to development combines poverty reduction, economic growth and strategic action on environmental risks, and each of these ambitions must be embedded across the post-2015 development framework.

Whilst the post-2015 process may result in a specific environmental sustainability goal, for resilient development all post-2015 goals should help to set countries on a pathway which supports their long term needs, including managing future uncertainty and complexity. For example, the framework should give all nations the opportunity to benefit from the energy revolution, to become more resource efficient and resilient to disaster, as well as strengthening their economies.

Designing the post-2015 framework so that it passes four environmental resilience tests would ensure that development goals incentivise and set countries on a sustainable long term development path: one with stronger economies, more domestic resources for development and lasting poverty reduction for current and future generations.

The framework should:

1. Support environmentally resilient poverty reduction, by building national and community capacity to respond to climate impacts and natural resource constraints. For example, by:

- a. adapting water, energy and food systems to respond to a changing climate and other resource constraints;
- b. supporting small scale farming to increase flexibility and diversity of production, as well as delivering local food security;
- c. identifying and tackling underlying risk factors for development, such as rapid unplanned urbanisation or decline in ecosystem services and biodiversity.

2. Deliver resource efficiency and security, by building good resource management and sustainable resource use into national growth models, as well as increased transparency, access and rights for local communities. For example, by:

- a. seeking international shifts in resource consumption to more sustainable models, ensuring a more equitable and secure supply for all;
- b. requiring clear reporting from the private sector, which encourages positive environmental and social outcomes, drives good practice, and reduces negative impacts on people and the environment.

3. Enable access to sustainable, secure, clean energy for all, through economic growth models built on low carbon, renewable energy sources and energy efficiency. For example, by:

- a. encouraging developing countries to 'leapfrog' to renewable energy, to deliver sustainable energy access and green, equitable economic growth;
- b. using decentralised energy systems to deliver renewable energy to clinics, schools and businesses.

4. Reduce vulnerability to, and the impact of, disasters and, in turn, reduce the need for humanitarian aid, while protecting lives, livelihoods and economic investments. For example, by:

- a. creating partnerships for disaster risk reduction (DRR), including climate scientists working with local authorities and communities to develop disaster response systems;
- b. building DRR measures into infrastructure and services, such as establishing national cross-sector DRR platforms to work between agriculture, business, health, education and others.

This holistic post-2015 framework must apply to both developed and developing countries, enabling all nations to live within the planetary and social boundaries which are essential to long term global sustainability.

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Green Alliance

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