National Implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda

On October 14 and 15, 2014, the *Post-2015 Data Test* team, an initiative led by the Centre for Policy Dialogue and the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, in association with Southern Voice on Post-MDG International Development Goals and with the support of the United Nations Foundation and the Hewlett Foundation, convened two workshops to bring country-level perspectives to discussions on the post-2015 agenda by assessing the implications of implementing the new agenda at the national level. The workshops provided an opportunity for experts from seven countries to share their experience and research findings with member states, think tanks, UN and civil society in the New York policy community, and to explore implications for the data revolution and for the post-2015 agenda more broadly.

Day 1: Unpacking the Post-2015 Data Revolution at the Country Level

Researchers tested a sample set of universal and country-specific goals and targets across a variety of country contexts and assessed data adequacy for monitoring the post-2015 agenda at the country level, with the goal of injecting national level realities into the global level deliberations. The study included: Bangladesh, Canada, Peru, Tanzania, Turkey, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. See the Data Test website for full presentations. Key Findings:

- **Universality and country ownership:** Allowing countries the space and flexibility to identify national priorities within a universal framework is critical to ensuring robust adoption and resonance across countries of differing income levels.
- **Data quality**: Data quality was poorest on governance, environmental sustainability and human rights goals, while it was better on poverty, education and employment/growth.
- **Disaggregated data:** Significant investment in disaggregated data will be required to deliver the "leave no one behind" agenda – and as potential to be most transformative.
- **Data is political**: There is demand for better data and a heightened awareness from citizens about the value of and need for data. However, many elites are not necessarily advocates of more and better data because it enhances accountability.
- **Global minimum standards** are not relevant across all income levels. Researchers found that they may not be feasible in low-income countries, while for many high and middle-income countries they may already accomplished.

State of Data Availability and Quality at the Country Level

Experts from the Post-2015 Data Test presented their findings on the state of data availability and quality at the country level, discussing the major trends in data quality, availability, accessibility and usability in different sectors across the sample countries, and considering the feasibility of selected "zero" or "minimum standard" targets. Key Findings:

- There is consensus on the need for better and more frequent data that is **disaggregated.**
- The collection of data is both a **technical and political issue**. Technological hurdles are largely a question of resourcing and methodologies. At the country level, **data availability and quality can be enhanced** by resourcing statistical offices, staff and tools; collecting more data in rural areas; and improving methodologies and periodicity.

- **Global minimum standards** must encourage more frequent data collection but be flexible enough to take into account national development policies.
- There is a **disjoint between policy goals and the data tools** required. Many data systems don't currently disaggregate to the level required. Linkages between the national and international systems are also unclear.
- **The data revolution** needs to develop common terminology, encourage investment in data tools, establish best practice in implementation, and address the poor exchange between national statistical offices and ministries.

Comparing the Global and the National

A lunch discussion with member state representatives examined the prospects for implementing a global agenda at the national level, and the implications for national planning and policy-making. An overarching theme was that data, statistics and what gets measured is not merely a technocratic exercise; demand for data is inherently political.

- The data revolution is not only about SDGs. **The SDGs are an opportunity and an entry point to do something bigger because of the global attention** --both politically and from citizens-- they can attract. We must build on that momentum.
- While some thought the role of data experts was merely technocratic, others contended that data **and what gets measured is inherently political** and that research think tanks who generate and assess data can both **inform policies and create demand.**
- The **"Data Revolution"** should redistribute power by making data more available. The High-Level Panel on Post-2015 called for a data *and* a transparency revolution.
- The **apparent contradiction between universality and country specificity** in global minimum standards can be addressed by the criteria by which you measure success. Some African countries that are seen as lagging most behind are actually trailblazers if success is measured by progress on national baselines, and not just by achievement.
- **Mexico's MDG experience** was successful because it was in the remit of the President's office. But there was a lag before the MDGs gained traction; this time around, Mexico is thinking about implementation now.
- **"Our data cannot be more revolutionary than our societal goals"**. If we do not get to the sources of the problem – inequalities, injustices -- cannot overcome merely by data.

Questions for further consideration:

- How much space is the international community prepared to relinquish to countries to determine what matters most to them?
- How do we generate demand for evidence-based policymaking? Once data is collected, how do we encourage policymakers to use it in their decision making?
- What are the incentives for governments to report on progress at the global level?

Implications for the Data Revolution and the Post-2015 Framework

Experts considered the institutional and policy challenges for pursuing a data revolution at the country level and at the global level, and the priority actions for the data revolution that could be integrated into the post-2015 agenda.

- **Tensions exist between global and national agendas**. We need to align the multilateral framework with country systems, address policy coherence for development and global systemic challenges, and engage domestic stakeholders.
- **Data should be integrated into national planning**, using new data tools to measure new areas in the agenda, with a percentage of GDP set aside to support data and monitoring.
- **Resourcing** is needed to build capacity and technologies for statistical offices. An agenda that allows for country specificity will guide resources to measuring what matters.
- **Policy coherence for sustainable development requires line ministries to work together and build cross-sectoral indicators**. The OECD is doing work on this.
- The level of consensus around the need for a data revolution represents an opportunity for member states to build **concrete proposals on data** in the post-2015 agenda.

Wrap-up – Day 1

The **Data Revolution can be an enabler for accountability and for delivering on commitments**. The challenge ahead is three-pronged:

1. Technical: data quality, disaggregation, and periodicity
2. Political: universality, global minimum standards, demand for data
3. Process: coordination between government entities, policy and legal frameworks

Southern think tanks are highly influential in setting the post-2015 agenda, and occupy the space between the technical and political in the following ways:

Using data to measure and achieve goals; looking at what is currently measurable, and what must be measured in the future and create that demand; connecting government entities with each other, enabling civil society to demand data and accountability; and infusing advocacy with policy, backed up by data, research and analysis.

Data is the bridge between transparency and accountability. Let's give politicians the tools they need to deliver on commitments. Strengthening institutional capacity in this regard is key.

How does our ability to measure goals relate to the broader debate about how many goals we should have? If the barometer is "*is that a measurable goal*?" then we'll go back to the same MDG model. Instead, we should be asking "*Is that important? How do we get it measured?*"

Data can move the needle on our societal goals. Now is the time to get the results of these studies into the debates taking place in New York and into national deliberations.

Day 2: View from the field: How will the Post-2015 Agenda be delivered and implemented?

Opportunities and Challenges for Implementing the Post-2015 Agenda

Day 2 explored practical questions of implementation, delivery and accountability through the lens of country experiences. Questions included: What does a universal agenda mean in terms of

a national and global architecture? How can we address the non-measurable but important issues, and how will they be resourced? What will we be doing differently come January 2016?

5 A's to consider for implementation:

1. **Architecture**: What architecture is needed to implement a complex and robust agenda?
2. **Accountability**: How are the accountability mechanisms going to work at the global and national levels, and what framework is going to intersect between the two levels?
3. **Actors:** Who needs to be engaged in implementation?
4. **Analysis:** Where are our analytical gaps in the implementation agenda?
5. **Action:** What are the few actions that we can prioritize now and move on quickly?

Key implementation challenges for 2016 and beyond

- **Issues of resource coordination** came out strongly – not only from the data perspective, but on access to resources, efficiency of resource use, and creating a balance between all the types of goals. How will relative resource allocation mix with the goal, targets, and implementation? To what extent will that be set nationally vs. by donors?
- **Reporting requirements**: this complex architecture will require more reporting but with scarce resources. How to balance complex reporting requirements needed with time and resources for quality data collection and implementation? How will it be financed?
- **How are policy systems going to cope with setting prodigious numbers of targets**? We should take historical lessons from which implementation strategies have worked.
- **Political will at country level is another concern.** Many governments say they have their own national strategies for 2020 or 2030. There may not be desire to implement some of the more controversial OWG issues like climate change or sexual rights.
- **Now that reaching for "higher hanging fruit" it will be harder to implement goals**. Governments need to take on a specific set of responsibilities and the international community must commit to enhancing capacity of governments to implement them.
- **Building constituencies is one of biggest challenges ahead**. Need national and local constituencies that are sufficiently aware and committed to moving this forward.
- **Need to look more closely at the scale of needs**. Which types of financing flows will have which impacts at the sub-national level?

Country experiences

How can national priorities of developing countries be reflected in the universal framework? How should financial and non-financial resources be used to implement SDGs at the national level?

In **Bangladesh's case**, domestic resource mobilization (DRM) has been a major source of achieving national goals, however a key issue is institutional efficiency. This is partly a governance question, but also a resource and absorptive capacity issue. In Bangladesh's MDG experience, for example, donors did not take into account resources required for training.

What factors account for Bangladesh's success on MDG implementation? Bangladesh has always had a 5-year development plan, so despite changes in political leadership, there has always been **policy continuity.** Bangladesh also has large number of **active NGOs** that have complemented

the work of government – from education, health and gender to microcredit. **The private sector has also contributed to its economic growth, i.e., in the garment industry, but could be a much more responsible player.** For example by paying more taxes, better wages, and benefits.

In Uganda's case, researchers found that citizen's priorities were different from the government's priorities. Citizens were interested in education and an open and accountable government, whereas the government prioritized energy, infrastructure, gender, and environmental sustainability –**areas were the data is weakest**. Energy and infrastructure are, however, the biggest challenge holding Uganda back **–** and progress on these could solve much of the poverty, climate, and environmental issues. Rising inequalities are also a major challenge.

Non-financial resources like **stemming capital flight and illicit financial flows and increasing access to technology will be a game-changers for developing countries** – from increasing financial inclusivity to access to information and access to energy.

In Pakistan's context, a major implementation challenge is that we don't yet know which tools are working and which are not. **Impact evaluations are either non-existent or poor**; and better monitoring and timely data are needed to find the best policy mix for various types of goals. Need to reform public budgeting; Pakistani civil society and researchers are lobbying for this.

Are we ready to implement the Post-2015 Agenda?

The final session engaged experts and member states in a discussion on the policy and institutional infrastructure required at the country level to implement the post-2015 agenda, the role of different stakeholders in implementation and monitoring, and whether there are sufficient platforms for stakeholder engagement at the country-level. Key Findings:

- **We are moving towards a more complex development agenda and a more complex world.** Will we be facing more shocks and unpredictability in the future?
- In practice, **the SDGs may be used as an aspirational framework**, not a bible. Countries will be driven by their national priorities, events and emergencies.
- **Implementation and monitoring must be done holistically**. Yet policymakers still work in silos; need to look at cross-cutting policies that move countries forward on several fronts.
- A **participatory approach in planning and monitoring** will allow the goals to be owned by everyone, from the community level to the global level.
- Monitoring should **incentivize governments** and build confidence at the global level. It should be done frequently and **provide space for lessons to be shared**.
- **Look closely at multi-stakeholder initiatives** and their impact on the development process.
- **There will be multiple actors and more diverse sources of finance**. How do we ensure financial flows are sustainable? What kind of resources helps countries develop? How do we leverage private finance towards productive capacity building and not some other means?
- Need to determine the **critical priorities of the new global partnership**. Is it ODA? Climate finance? Quota-free access to markets?

Wrap-up – Day 2

We have achieved huge progress on development in the past 20 years, but there have also been failures, particularly where collective action is needed to address common problems. A strong agreement on a new set of SDGs can be transformative in the following ways:

- **Normative effects**, including the principle of universality and the goal on reducing inequality
- By providing a **social mobilization framework** for justice and human progress at all levels
- By providing **policy directions** and frameworks for sharing lessons
- By promoting **mobilization of the resources** needed to realize the vision
- To facilitate and strengthen **collective action** for issues we cannot solve at the national level

We need the following five things to get implementation traction:

1. A coherent vision and goal set
2. A coherent and effective architecture to motivate countries to set and implement targets
3. A financing and implementation agenda that delivers for the poorest, and addresses global tax rules. Consider how to mobilize private capital and include new donors in the agenda
4. A framework for social mobilization, advocacy and dialogue, acknowledging that it will need to be done in issue clusters. Will you get orphan issues that lack constituencies?
5. Strong links to other intergovernmental processes, such as the UNFCCC

Finally, three big questions for raised for further consideration:

1. Whether **linear progress towards a target is reasonable**, given a world of uncertainty and shocks. Who takes responsibility when states are overwhelmed or fragmenting?
2. **Accountability of private sector actors** – how to enforce? What framework?
3. **How this agenda drive efforts to transform the situations of the most disadvantaged** and marginalized people? Data disaggregation and the principle that no target be considered met unless met for all social groups were raised as potentially the most transformative aspects of this agenda.