

Reaching the world's most vulnerable children

The issues at a glance

To keep children at the heart of the post-2015 agenda, World Vision will focus on ensuring that the enhanced development goals

- are responsive to the voices of children by facilitating the engagement of children and youth networks in Post-2015 consultative processes; and
- prominently reflect the needs of the most vulnerable children in all contexts, including fragile states.

Introduction

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) catalysed significant improvements in the lives of millions of the world's children, but they have not yet brought about enough change. Three years from their target date, the world must accelerate efforts towards the achievement of every goal.

As we look to 2015, we recognise that not every goal will be met, and that since the goals were set, many of the world's most vulnerable children have missed out. Even the best-case results will leave the job unfinished after 2015, because the goals themselves aim only to halve world poverty.

World Vision believes that an enhanced set of goals is the best way to complete this unfinished business. The new goals should substantially reflect the existing goals in their overall focus on well-being, but should also address the well-recognised shortcomings of the MDGs so that their results can reach all of the world's most vulnerable children.

As a leading global child-focused organisation, we believe that the effectiveness of all development goals should be measured against their success in eliminating poverty among the most vulnerable children, including those in fragile contexts. This is the best pathway for the elimination of poverty for all.

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Children in Faridkot, Punjab, India. Alyssa Bistonath/World Vision

Overall, we will focus on ensuring that the enhanced development goals:

- are responsive to the voices of children by facilitating the engagement of children and youth networks in Post-2015 consultative processes; and
- prominently reflect the needs of the most vulnerable children in all contexts, including fragile states.

What we have learned from the Millennium Development Goals

The first generation of MDGs, launched in 2000, took some ten years to develop. Their strength and significance comes from the way in which they focussed international attention on global poverty and enhanced the provision of coordinated international action. The fact that they were clear, concise and measurable encouraged and enabled that focus.

World Vision has added to the international momentum of the MDGs to push for a reduction in child and maternal mortality (MDGs 4 and 5) through our Child Health Now campaign, and we continue to call for all stakeholders to fulfil their current commitments. We will also push for a renewed international consensus that compels action on global development targets on child and maternal health and nutrition. More than for any other of the current goals, World Vision understands what is needed to ‘finish the job’ for MDGs 4 and 5.

Despite their success in galvanising global action on a limited set of goals, the MDGs have been far from perfect. One of the co-authors of the original goals has acknowledged that:

“...they represent a reductionist view of development. They are too limited in scope; their definition is too narrowly focused on the social sectors; ... they omit fundamental objectives contained in the Millennium Declaration, such as peace and security, human rights, democracy and good governance, and the protection of the most vulnerable...”¹

The focus of the MDGs on global aggregates and ‘one size fits all’ global targets has allowed states to meet their MDG targets without addressing the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable. An enhanced set of goals must apply **an equity lens** that requires policies and programmes to be directed toward the most vulnerable and marginalised groups.

Furthermore, the MDGs were developed at a time when the majority of the world’s poor lived in the least developed countries. An emerging reality is that the majority of the poor now live in **middle-income** countries.

The MDGs were created largely by donor countries. The next set need to be determined in a more cooperative and **inclusive** fashion by deliberately involving developing and middle-income governments and their citizens.

Finally, the MDGs have been unsuccessful in creating momentum in the context of **fragile states**, where millions of children and their families have missed out on the progress experienced in more politically stable countries. Addressing this challenge is no small task, but it must be taken up as the new framework is designed.

World Vision’s priorities for the Post-2015 development agenda

1. Equity measured by impact on the most vulnerable children.

We recognise the challenge of making any global framework completely fair or equitable, but we will put our hand on the scales to promote the interests of the most vulnerable children. We support the drive to prioritise a universal commitment to equity in the new goals. Our experience and the evidence of our work offer constructive ways that these ideals can be realised.

The MDGs have been perhaps least successful in addressing inequity. They were blind to the differences between countries and did not provide incentives for governments to reach out to their most vulnerable – and often hardest to reach – people. Rising levels of inequality around the world have shown that while development and economic growth have improved the lives of millions of poor people, the poorest have not benefited. The rising tide has been shown not to lift all boats, and recent scholarship has even argued that inequity negatively affects the better-off as well as the poor.²

As economies are growing across the developing world, targeting aid to the poorest segments of society has the potential to close the inequality gap. In a world of limited resources for development, our focus on the most vulnerable applies an equity framework, channelling those resources to those places and people who are missing the benefits of broad-based growth.

2. Children and youth participating in agenda-setting.

Our understanding of the rights of all people, including children, to have a say in decisions affecting them tells us that children, their families and communities need a place at the table where the new goals are developed.

Their participation in the implementation of initiatives under an enhanced set of goals also needs to be planned for in the design of the goals, with indicators of participation part of the final product.



Beauty and Belinda, Lupane ADP, Zimbabwe. Leonard Makombe/World Vision

The direct participation of children and youth will be most important in the UN-led consultations being held at the national level, and World Vision will work through our national offices and local coalitions to help ensure that this takes place in at least 10 countries. There should also be opportunities at the regional and global levels for direct participation of youth, and the rights of younger children need to be given adequate focus at all levels of the consultations as well.

3. Context-driven targets responding to fragility.

The right architecture for an enhanced set of goals will be essential to reach the most vulnerable children. The current goals are strong on common international targets but weak on country- or subnational-level interpretation of those targets. This dynamic must be reversed, with continued ambition for the global goals but stronger mandates and accountability for governments to use the best local information to set national/regional-level targets that will more effectively reach the most vulnerable members of their populations. In the push for a universal set of goals, such a context-driven approach will make meaningful progress possible for all countries.

For the world's most fragile and conflict-affected states, the MDGs failed to respond to the extent of their poverty reduction challenge and to the very different nature of that challenge. Incorporating context-driven targets into the post-2015 will better address their

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particular needs and contexts. Peacebuilding and governance – issues integral to World Vision's own approach to development in fragile contexts – are not addressed in the current MDGs. The efforts of governments to improve governance and eliminate conflict for the well-being of their communities, including children, need to be featured in the goals and measured.

World Vision's engagement in the Post-2015 process

As part of developing the post-2015 framework, the United Nations is planning activities at both the international and national levels, involving a range of stakeholders. As these discussions will shape the global development agenda for at least the next decade, World Vision has a significant interest in ensuring that a global commitment is achieved and will engage in all streams of consultation.

- At the national level, the UN has specified that it will conduct consultations in more than 50 countries. World Vision will actively participate in at least ten of these national consultations.³
- On thematic consultations, the UN has identified eleven areas where it will invite global debate. Beyond health, World Vision has experience and expertise across most of the thematic streams, but we will focus our input on health, food security and nutrition, and conflict and fragility.
- World Vision will also seek opportunities to interact with individual members of the High Level Panel and with the Panel itself as it holds regional and global-level consultations. Globally, we will participate in the 'Global Conversation' process being led by the UN Millennium Campaign, and will seek to involve citizens from the communities with whom we partner and supporters from many of the 100 countries where we work.
- Finally, World Vision will partner with and provide leadership in civil society initiatives and inter-agency groups, with a particular focus on most vulnerable children. These include Beyond 2015 and the Berlin Civil Society Centre. We will also seek to influence private sector (corporate) actors and consultation processes in our priority policy areas.

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ENDNOTES:

¹ Vandemoortele, Jan (2012) Advancing the global development agenda post-2015: Some thoughts, ideas and practical suggestions.
http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Vandemoortele%20Background%20Paper_1.pdf

² Wilkinson, Richard & Pickett, Kate (2009) The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger. London: Penguin Books.

³ Initially Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Armenia, Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), India and Indonesia. As the UN has now expanded the list of countries to more than 50, we may participate in more national consultations.