

BACKGROUND PAPER 2

# Grounding Post-2015 Frameworks in Regional, National and Local Contexts

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This paper draws on ‘Grounding post-2015 frameworks in bottom-up action learning’, IRF Briefing Note by Tighe Geoghegan (February 2014).

IRF2015 is a collaboration of 11 leading research institutes from across the globe that responds to the need for independent, rigorous and timely analysis to inform the evolution of the post-2015 development agenda and the concurrent intergovernmental process on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed to at Rio+20. IRF2015 partners envision a post-2015 development agenda that is universal in scope, takes an integrated approach to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of global development challenges, and can lead to more sustainable and equitable development outcomes for all.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of IRF2015 partner organizations.

The success of the post-2015 development framework will ultimately depend on how effectively it can be applied across wide-ranging social, economic and political contexts. The Open Working Group's (OWG's) mandate is to generate a set of goals which "guide and contribute to transformative change as stipulated in the Rio+20 outcome document, in support of rights-based, equitable and inclusive processes that enhance sustainability at global, regional, national and local levels."<sup>1</sup>

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer the best opportunity yet to achieve a global commitment to sustainable development, backed by strong action from local to international level. But this will only succeed if the new universal framework offers opportunities for every country that endorses the goals. This presents two major challenges for the new agreement's formulation and its translation into programmes and priorities for action.

### Challenge 1

**The agreement must ensure that the goals are relevant to the actual priorities of sectoral ministries and other government agencies, private firms, and civil society.** For the post-2015 framework to be fit for purpose, influencing governments and other stakeholders, it will have to be useful in supporting and enabling national development efforts, and effective in providing incentives for countries to take ambitious action on domestic and global challenges.

The post-2015 framework should be clearly aligned to 'on the ground' realities in order to complement countries' national strategies for action and to engage key civil society and private sector actors in implementation. We need to avoid generating a 'supply side' outcome that is largely driven by UN-level priorities, consensus and compromises and runs the risk of being ignored and marginalised by many governments, civil society organisations and private sector actors.

### Challenge 2

**The new framework must be intellectually coherent and robust.** The OWG mandate calls for integration of the social priorities of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with economic and environmental objectives, as set out in the Rio outcome document. The most practical means to address this challenge is through learning from the many experiences of government, private sector and civil society policies and programmes that have attempted to approach development issues in an integrated way.

These challenges are very relevant for the current agenda-setting phase of the process, and will continue to be significant during the implementation phase when the SDGs are translated into new programmes and policy tools and integrated into existing development frameworks and institutions. Substantial capacity and learning already exists, and if the new goal set can connect with these effectively then it will have greatly increased leverage and impact.

Achieving progress on the range of issues addressed in the OWG co-chairs' list of 19 focus areas in an integrated way is most feasible at local and national level. Although the goals will include targets that require collective international action, progress on these transnational issues can also be assessed through their effect on local and national level indices of sustainability and human wellbeing.

This paper is intended to address the two challenges presented above and provide some useful examples and analysis to inform discussion during the April Tarrytown retreat:

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<sup>1</sup> 'Initial input of the Secretary-General to the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals', UNGA A/67.634, December 2012.

**Section 1** provides some examples of national and regional policy priorities, to show the different issues given precedence in diverse contexts. It also sets out a framework that could be used at national level to work towards integrated and coherent action plans that build on existing priorities and capacities.

**Section 2** proposes some simple criteria for success in framing Goals which will be effective in supporting transformation at local, national and regional levels.

**Section 3** outlines work IRF plans to carry out over the coming 1-2 years to ensure a strong and positive connection between global priorities and local, national and regional-level implementation.

## Section 1: Designing a new goal framework – how to build on local, national and regional priorities and expertise

### What do key implementers of the SDGs actually prioritise?

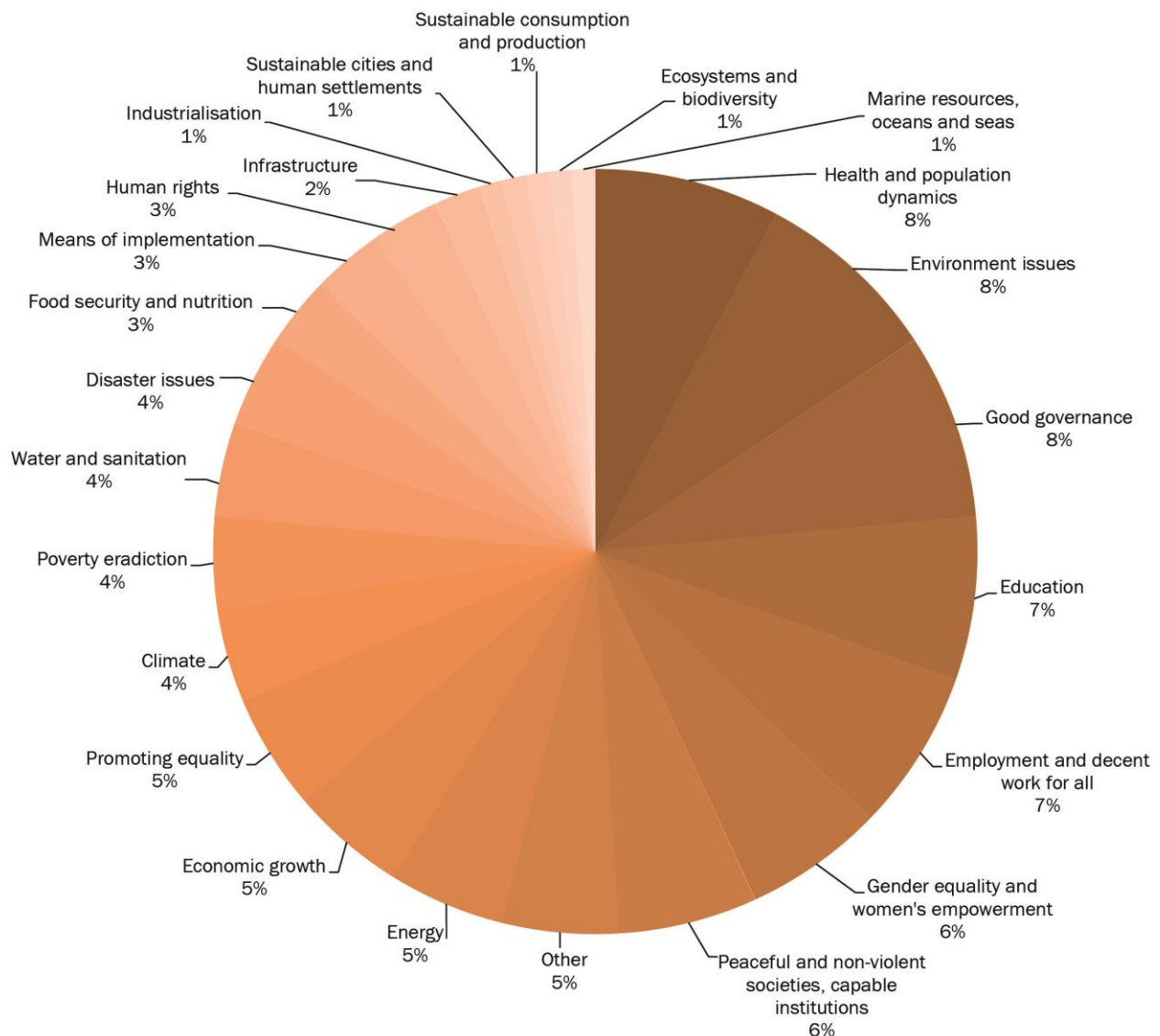
We have reviewed the results of national consultations in 15 Asian countries on post-2015 – see detail in Figure 1 below. The most important issues that arose from this assessment were:

- Health and population
- Good governance
- Various environmental issues, including climate change
- Employment and decent work
- Education; and
- Gender equality and women’s empowerment

These issues were articulated slightly differently depending on where the consultation was conducted. There was no consistent methodology for obtaining this information across countries, so some stuck more closely to the overall themes suggested by the UN, while others were less stringent.

The purpose of this comparison is to indicate the diversity in prioritisation between countries, and not to single out specific issues and argue that these should receive stronger attention. This highlights the importance of solid information flows vertically between capitals and New York so that by the end of 2015 we have a set of goals that has been informed by national level priorities and as a result has the highest possible relevance for national level reality. It also indicates the need for the Goal set to accommodate a wide range of issues while also allowing implementers (national governments, municipalities, private companies etc.) to focus on the elements which are particularly significant for their context.

**Figure 1. Thematic priorities from national consultations in 15 Asian countries**



This rough survey compares consultation reports from 15 Asian countries with the 19 Focus Areas of the OWG. Issues which appeared only at national level are: disaster issues; human rights; good governance; and environmental issues. This very limited sample is not representative of the whole Asia-Pacific region, but the trend shows that at national level the most important issues which respondents highlighted are (i) health; (ii) environment issues; (iii) good governance; (iv) education; and (v) employment and decent work. Even these issues were articulated slightly differently depending on where the consultation was conducted, so for example the bundle of environment issues were often connected with natural resource management and disaster risk reduction.

The tables below show the national priority statements from Chile, the Caribbean, Namibia, Zambia, Nepal, Bhutan and the European Union compared with the OWG framework. These illustrate policy objectives emerging from domestic prioritisation and from national and regional positions on the post-2015 process. They are intended to indicate the diversity of topline issues, and also potential for the new goal framework to connect with existing interests:

<b>Chile</b> – policy priorities of national government 2014-2018	Free, universal, good quality education from cradle to university	Reduce income inequality	Develop a new energy strategy and policy that supports environmentally sustainable growth
<b>OWG Focus Areas</b> that are directly relevant	<b>Focus Area 4</b> is on Education.	<b>Focus Area 12</b> to Promote equality includes “promoting differentially high per capita income growth at the bottom of the income distribution.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Focus Area 7</b> on Energy includes “deployment of cleaner, including low- or zero-emissions energy technologies; improving energy efficiency“</li> <li>• <b>Focus Area 8</b> on Economic growth includes “substantially improving energy and resource productivity of economic activities”</li> <li>• <b>Focus Area 9</b> on Industrialisation includes “advancing sustainable industrial development based on energy- and resource-efficient and environmentally sound industrial processes”</li> <li>• <b>Focus Area 10</b> on Infrastructure includes “provision of infrastructure for access to modern energy services; due account for environmental and social impacts of existing and planned infrastructure from a lifecycle perspective.”</li> </ul>
Source: Bachelet, Michelle. 2013. Chile de Todos. Programa de Gobierno 2014-2018. Comando Presidencial de M Bachelet: Santiago, Chile. 193 p.			

<b>Caribbean priorities</b>	<b>Public sector debt</b>	<b>Crime</b>	<b>Climate change</b>	<b>Natural disaster preparedness and response</b>
<b>OWG Focus Areas</b> that are directly relevant	<b>Focus Area 8</b> on Economic Growth includes “ensuring debt sustainability.”	<b>Focus Area 19</b> on Peaceful and Non-violent Societies, Rule of Law and Capable Institutions includes “combating organised crime” and “reduction of crime, violence, abuse, exploitation, including against children and women.”	<b>Focus Area 15</b> is dedicated to Climate.	<b>Focus Area 13</b> on Sustainable cities and Human settlements includes “strengthening resilience to natural disasters”
Source: Nicole Leotaud, CANARI (personal communication)				

<b>Namibian priorities</b>	<b>Improving provisions for the needs of the poor</b>	<b>Job creation, especially for women and youth</b>	<b>Reducing the income gap</b>
<b>OWG Focus Areas</b> that are directly relevant	<b>Focus Area 1</b> on Poverty eradication includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eradicating absolute poverty</li> <li>• Reducing relative poverty</li> </ul>	<b>Focus Area 11</b> on Employment and decent work for all includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting full employment through macroeconomic policy</li> <li>• Addressing youth unemployment through policies and strategies</li> </ul>	<b>Focus Area 12</b> to Promote equality includes “promoting differentially high per capita income growth at the bottom of the income distribution.”

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing social protection and social protection floors as relevant to reduce vulnerabilities of the poor</li> </ul>	<p>aimed at providing young people with access to decent and productive work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitating the participation of women in the labour force</li> </ul>	
<p>Source: Sims, B.M and Koep, M. 2012. Unfinished Business: Democracy in Namibia. Institute for Democracy in Africa (Idasa); Government of Namibia. 2012, Namibia's Fourth National Development Plan; and IMF. 2014. NAMIBIA 2013 ARTICLE IV CONSULTATION—STAFF REPORT. No. 4 14/40</p>			

Zambian priorities	Poverty eradication	Needs and welfare of women, children and youth	Quality education
<b>OWG Focus Areas</b> that are directly relevant	<b>Focus Area 1</b> is dedicated to Poverty eradication.	<p><b>Focus Area 5</b> is dedicated to Gender equality.</p> <p>Additionally, many of the focus areas include the need for protecting and promoting the welfare of women, children and youth, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Focus Area 2</b> on Sustainable agriculture, food security and nutrition</li> <li>• <b>Focus Area 3</b> on Health</li> <li>• <b>Focus Area 6</b> on Water and Sanitation</li> <li>• <b>Focus Area 7</b> on Energy</li> <li>• <b>Focus Area 11</b> on Employment and Decent Work for All</li> <li>• <b>Focus Area 12</b> on Promoting Equality</li> <li>• <b>Focus Area 19</b> on Peaceful societies</li> </ul>	<b>Focus Area 4</b> is dedicated to Education.
<p>Source: Member States' speeches to UN General Assembly: <a href="http://gadebate.un.org/">http://gadebate.un.org/</a></p>			

Nepal priorities	Energy access, efficiency, sustainability	Food security and sustainable agriculture	Sustainable cities
<b>OWG Focus Areas</b> that are directly relevant	<b>Focus Area 7</b> is dedicated to Energy.	<b>Focus Area 2</b> is dedicated to Sustainable agriculture, food security and nutrition.	<b>Focus Area 13</b> is dedicated to Sustainable cities and human settlements.
<p>Source: National Planning Commission (Govt. of Nepal), 2012, <i>Status Paper United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) Synopsis</i>. <a href="http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1018nepalnationalreport.pdf">http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1018nepalnationalreport.pdf</a></p>			

Bhutan priorities	Equitable socio-economic development including women's empowerment	Conservation of the environment	Preservation and promotion of culture
<b>OWG Focus Areas</b> that are directly relevant	<p><b>Focus Area 1 on Poverty eradication</b> includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addressing inequalities at both national and international levels</li> <li>• "Pursuing sustained and inclusive economic growth"</li> </ul> <p><b>Focus Area 5</b> is dedicated to Gender equality and women's empowerment</p>	<p><b>Focus Area 17</b> is on Ecosystems and biodiversity, and <b>Focus Area 15</b> on Climate change. Additionally, many of the focus areas include the need for environmentally sound and sustainable policies, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Focus Area 8</b> on Economic growth</li> <li>• <b>Focus Area 9</b> on Industrialisation</li> <li>• <b>Focus Area 10</b> on Infrastructure</li> <li>• <b>Focus Area 12</b> to Promote</li> </ul>	<p><b>Focus Area 4</b> on Education includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Integrating sustainable development in education curriculums, including awareness raising on how culture advances sustainable development."</li> </ul>

	<b>Focus Area 12</b> is to Promote equality	equality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Focus Area 13</b> on Sustainable cities and human settlements</li> <li>● <b>Focus Area 14</b> to Promote Sustainable Consumption and Production</li> <li>● <b>Focus Area 18</b> on Means of Implementation</li> </ul>	
Source: National Report for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, 2012, <i>Bhutan: In Pursuit of Sustainable Development</i> . Available from: <a href="http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/798bhutanreport.pdf">http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/798bhutanreport.pdf</a>			

EU priorities	Inclusive and sustainable economic growth	Human rights based approach across the focus areas	Peaceful and non-violent societies and capable institutions
<b>OWG Focus Areas</b> that are directly relevant	<b>Focus Area 8</b> on Economic Growth includes “achieving sustained and inclusive economic growth.”	Several focus areas refer to rights, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Focus Area 1</b> on Poverty Eradication</li> <li>● <b>Focus Area 5</b> on Gender equality and women’s empowerment</li> <li>● <b>Focus Area 11</b> on Employment and decent work for all</li> <li>● <b>Focus Area 19</b> on Peaceful societies</li> </ul>	<b>Focus Area 19</b> is dedicated to Peaceful and non-violent societies, rule of law and capable institutions.
Source: Statement on behalf of the European Union and its Member States from OWG-9 meeting			

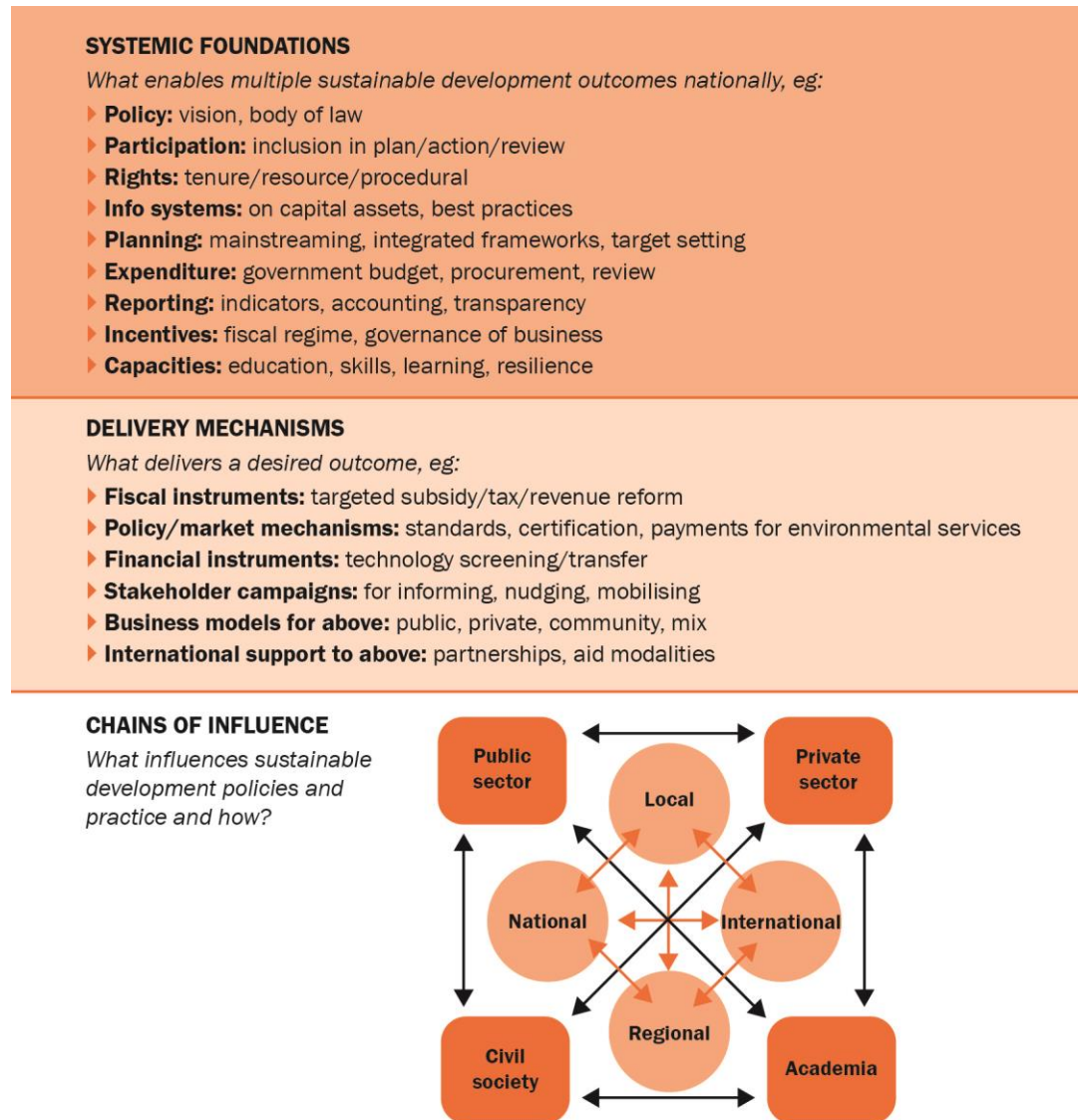
How can this comparison between the OWG focus areas and different countries’ national priorities inform the development of the goal framework in the future? IRF proposes to work with OWG members and their colleagues in-country, plus other key stakeholders, to build better shared understanding of how local, national and regional policy frameworks and strategies can be harmonised with global goals and targets, and *vice versa*. This approach will require up to two years to complete, and therefore will run beyond the point at which the goals are finalised and into the period when focus shifts to implementation of the new goal framework. We believe it is important to integrate this perspective now so that it informs the framework which the OWG is developing. Our thinking is elaborated in Section 3 of this paper.

How can we strengthen the enabling environment for integrating or ‘mainstreaming’ action on globally agreed goals across sectors, policy domains and institutions? This sort of integration contrasts with the narrowly sectoral approaches which characterised the MDGs, in which for example health ministries alone were responsible for health-related targets, environmental ministries for environment targets and so forth. It is now widely understood that development progress is often impeded by such narrowly conceived strategies. Moving to strategies that integrate actions across many policy arenas, sectors and social actors is not easy, but there are examples from around the world of it being done at different scales. Effective national research processes would offer countries a valuable opportunity for identifying, learning from and building upon such experiences.

This ‘action learning’ approach also offers the possibility of reducing the divides between different sectors of society, by bring government, private sector, civil society and community representatives together to develop common strategies with agreed roles for all.

Figure 2 offers a preliminary framework for these national processes of analysis which will be developed as the work progresses.

**Figure 2. Preliminary analytic framework**



## Section 2: Designing a new goal framework – criteria for success in achieving transformation

Elements of a simple ‘screen’ to test the strengths and weaknesses of the prototype goal framework could include:

- **Is it adaptable to very diverse contexts?** Is there a frame of reference for shared global objectives and does it identify appropriate prioritisation in different countries?
- **Does it help frame choices and trade-offs** and increase attention to sustainability and equity?

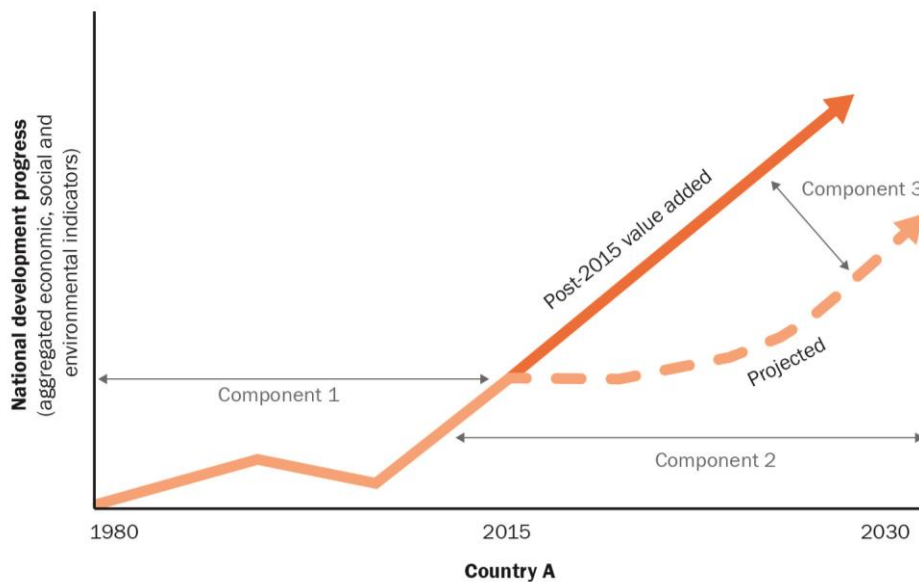


- **Does it clarify information needs** and means to strengthen local / national / regional capacity and accountability?
- Does it identify **priorities for international support and collaboration**, and also the externalities which need to be addressed? (E.g. impacts of richer countries, trade and investment regimes etc.)
- Does it capture key elements of the **transformation needed** to achieve the changes required? (see also the key transformations identified in Tarrytown Retreat Background Paper 1)

### Section 3: What can we do now to bridge the gap between national and global priorities?

During 2014 the Independent Research Forum plans to develop a bottom-up learning research agenda to inform the ongoing post-2015 goal process and as it moves into the implementation phase. The core aim of this 'bottom-up' learning is to help individual countries and the international agencies leading the post-2015 process to identify how a global framework and goals can most effectively add value to what countries are doing or planning to do on their own to achieve sustainable development objectives. The research agenda IRF is proposing involves three inter-related processes of analysis (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Components of the IRF research framework**



**Component 1: Analysing development trajectories in selected countries.** Looking back over a period of about 30 years, this aspect of the research will examine:

- Trajectories of economic, social and environmental progress, and their interactions with and impacts on one another;
- The drivers of those trajectories, potentially including policy frameworks, governance, political and social forces, internal and external economic forces, demographic trends, environmental vulnerability and risk, innovation, and international and regional cooperation; and

- The factors, events, choices and incentives that have defined the dynamics of change, with particular attention to patterns of national engagement with MDGs and other global or regional development frameworks and goals.

**Component 2: Context analysis.** This component looks forward over the next 15 years or so, based on current contexts and trends. Studies will be national or regional in scope and take an ‘action learning’ approach, engaging decision makers and change agents in participatory data collection, analysis and in identifying lessons and principles. There may be opportunities for synergies with other post-2015 national level consultative and data collection processes, such as the next phase of stakeholder consultations being organised by the United Nations in selected countries.

**Component 3: Analysing priorities for the post-2015 global framework.** Building on the previous learning and continuing the participatory analysis, this component will look at the policies, institutions, national targets and resources needed for a country to make use of and meet its commitments under the post-2015 goal framework. Questions to guide the research could include:

- Based on national contexts and needs, what targets towards global goals are most relevant and useful?
- What indicators of progress are feasible, and what monitoring systems and capacities are needed to track them?
- Where can international cooperation supplement and add value to national assets and capacities?
- What national contributions to achieving global goals beyond national boundaries are feasible, given national capacities and resources? (For example, can public goods be better managed, can development assistance be offered?)

IRF will explore opportunities to collaborate or share learning with other organisations involved in similar initiatives, such as the Unpacking the Data Revolution at the Country Level<sup>1</sup> and Sustainable Development Goals for a Small Planet<sup>2</sup> projects. Through facilitating such action learning processes with partners in interested countries, IRF will be able to develop methods, tools and approaches that could have wide application in national or sectoral post-2015 planning processes. These will be documented and made available for public use.

Over the coming months, IRF members plan to work with interested local, national and regional partners on this research agenda. Studies will examine countries at varying development levels and facing diverse development challenges, from small island states to rapidly industrialising and high income countries. IRF will use its international networks and activities to disseminate the learning coming out of this research, to bring the issues emerging from it to the international post-2015 debates, and to advocate for other research institutions to take up the agenda too.

In carrying out the research, IRF members will test and refine research methods, tools and approaches that can be used by others to extend the scope of research more widely. And where there is interest, IRF will continue working with national and regional institutions beyond 2015 to develop implementation frameworks, targets and strategies for achieving national commitments to post-2015 global goals that also contribute to national and local sustainable development.

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<sup>1</sup> Higgins, K. and D. Bhattacharya. 2014. Unpacking the data revolution at the country level. Blog, 21 January 2014. <http://post2015.org/2014/01/21/unpacking-the-data-revolution-at-the-country-level/>.

<sup>2</sup> Olsen, S.H. 2013. SDGs for a small planet. Blog, 23 December 2013. <http://www.irf2015.org/sdgs-small-planet>.