



Are we making progress with building governance into the post 2015 framework?¹

February 2013

Momentum is building for governance and accountability issues to have a greater profile in the post 2015 framework. Following their recent meeting in Monrovia, the High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda reaffirmed their importance in the [outcome statement](#):

“Economic growth alone is not sufficient to ensure social justice, equity and sustained prosperity for all people...The protection and empowerment of people is crucial. This will require peace building and stronger domestic institutions - including effective, accountable and transparent governments and peaceful, just and equitable societies that protect and promote human rights and eliminate all forms of violence.”

Early results of the global [MyWorld](#) citizen survey also show the extent that people see ‘an honest and responsive government’ as a top priority. This emerged as the second highest of a range of sixteen factors, above ‘better healthcare’ and second only to ‘a good education’ globally (and within the top five priorities for Low-Human Development Index countries). Yet we know from MDG experience to date that weaknesses in effective governance have been a central cause of development progress gaps.

This has been clearest in fragile and conflict affected states, which have been left furthest behind. Since 2000, global poverty has declined rapidly, except in these states, where poverty (measured by the two US dollar a day mark) [has remained almost unchanged](#). The ‘[New Deal](#)’ agreed among the g7+ group of fragile states reflects the argument that effective governance, in terms of developmental political and institutional arrangements, is a prerequisite to support effective and sustainable development in other areas such as health and education. So there is a growing recognition that we cannot afford to ignore governance in a new framework, even if [it is politically challenging to incorporate](#).

As a result, a number of areas have been gaining traction in the post 2015 conversation:

1. **Building accountability for goals into the heart of a new framework**, for example as a cross-cutting principle that applies to all areas. For instance, the Beyond2015 civil society coalition [calls for](#) a framework that clearly sets out “enforceable accountability mechanisms, as well as the process for accountability at a national, regional and global level.” This could apply to all actors that have a role in development, at the global and the national level, including a range of state and non-state actors.
2. **Ensuring there is transparency for how resources are used** based on the principles of open government and open data. This would build on the commitments that a range of countries have made through the Open Government Partnership, which signal that there may be less political sensitivity on this than other areas. Some concrete proposals have already been put forward, such as [Open for Development](#) by ONE and partners.
3. **Commitments on civil and political freedoms**. Proposals in the [Future Development Goals Tracker](#) reflect that ideas on this so far remain broad -

¹ This brief was written by Leni Wild and Gina Bergh, researchers at the Overseas Development Institute. It builds on another recent brief on ‘Making Transparency work’ by Gina Bergh, Marta Foresti, Alina Rocha Menocal and Leni Wild.

for instance Save the Children suggests “open, accountable and inclusive” governance, including freedom of speech, the press and political choice; and the [CIGI Bellagio Goals](#) propose “empowering people to realize their civil and political rights”, with targets on human rights and participation.

4. **Supporting effective institutions of the state.** This is currently being led by members of the g7+ group, whose chair, [H.E. Emilia Pires](#), noted at the High Level Panel in Monrovia: “We are also talking about ensuring the institutions of the state can deliver services to the people. It means that we as states can manage our own resources and revenues; continue to improve service delivery, build or strengthen our institutions and enhance citizen/state confidence.” [Graça Michel](#), member of the High Level Panel, also stressed the importance of supporting peace building and institutional strengthening in future commitments. Further proposals are likely to emerge from the g7+ and the Dili International Conference (25-28 February 2013).

A brief assessment of the debate

Some potential risks can be identified in the direction that these debates are heading.

First, there is a real danger that we get an increasingly polarised debate around the range of different proposals for integrating governance in the post 2015 framework. This may mean we end up with proposals that are either too aspirational or those that are not ambitious enough.

Second, the different proposals may get stuck in a discussion of governance either as an end in itself (i.e. in terms of voice, participation, human rights) or as a means to an end (improved economic growth, development outcomes and so on). Here, there will always be a range of views and evidence, and setting up an either/or dichotomy may not be productive.

Finally, there are risks that this remains an inward looking debate – carried among those in governance and accountability fields, concerning the relative importance of different factors (civil and political freedoms versus information flows, for instance). This could lead to missed opportunities to engage substantively with debates on other goals and targets around core public goods or social development outcomes, where governance and accountability components are also seen to be integral. It could also lead to missed opportunities to anchor governance in cross cutting issues, such as inequality, which we know are linked with the strength of institutions.

This is something not receiving much attention in discussion thus far, however ODI’s research reveals that [a range of governance \(and political\) factors](#) are key to achieving sustainable development outcomes, for example in basic service delivery. This implies a need for greater reflection on some of the developmental functions of governance, aside from particular forms of governance or institutions. This would require strengthening these functions in a post-2015 framework as cross cutting issues, but it would not necessarily mean abandoning options for stand-alone governance goals, however aspirational they may be (something our colleague Lisa Denney [recently discussed](#) in relation to freedom from insecurity and violence). Rather, we emphasise the need to make space in the discussion for considerations of how governance and accountability interact with other outcome-focused goals in a post 2015 framework.

This recommendation is based on our experience during the MDG period to date, which shows that there are no clear governance blueprints or institutional templates behind the range of countries which have met MDG goals or developed economically. Moreover, some of the clearest successes during the MDGs have had closer links with specific sub-national governance strategies to improve essential services than with the overall form of national governance. For instance the Orangi Pilot Project in Pakistan demonstrates how a major collaboration between government authorities and the local community (in this case almost 100,000 families) improved water and sanitation, with infant mortality rates in the project’s target area falling from 130 deaths per 1,000 live births in the early 1980s to fewer than 40 by 2006 ([UNDP, 2006](#)).

Integrating governance into a post 2015 framework: some initial proposals

Some political, governance and accountability features do seem to shape whether and how MDG commitments have been achieved (alongside important issues of resourcing, technical capacities and others). We have identified the following key factors²:

- **Credible political commitments between politicians and citizens are essential.** This refers to the extent to which political decisions are based on particular policy commitments, such as in health or education, rather than the interests of particular groups. This is where transparency and the strengthening of accountability for the post 2015 framework itself become interesting. But evidence also indicates that information needs to be put to good use in order to strengthen outcomes, which requires engagement among a range of actors, including civil society, media, the private sector and parliamentary actors. So it would be necessary to commit to strengthening the monitoring capacity of these actors alongside commitments on data availability and monitoring in any new goals.
- **More inclusive institutions matter, as well as the ability to work together.** How inclusive institutions are to different groups can be a key marker of the ability to deliver collective, public goods. While realistic benchmarks are needed, which take into account the starting points of different countries, it may be possible to develop cross cutting targets and indicators that monitor and seek to reduce levels of group-based inequalities and vulnerabilities over time. There is also evidence that strengthening the collective capacity to respond to development problems is important, rather than assuming the responsibilities of any one stakeholder alone. Developing measures of the collective capacity to respond (for example, tracking the diversity of groups involved, strength of networks and systems of accountability, rather than focusing only on responsibilities of some actors) may therefore also be important.
- **States effectiveness is a determinant of development progress, so state capacities and functions do need more attention.** This is where the g7+ group is making important contributions on the role of statebuilding in effective governance. It also offers scope to think creatively about how we measure and monitor state capacity. [Matt Andrews at Harvard](#), for instance, has proposed using birth registration as a proxy governance indicator, as it may provide a meaningful measure of performance capacity, and birth registration has obvious knock on impacts (e.g. ability to access services or to vote). The [level of policy coherence](#) could also be relevant as a measure of how coherent and capable key institutions are. This would require determining how clearly and consistently roles and responsibilities are defined across government ('horizontally') and between citizens and the state ('vertically').

The findings and recommendations above focus on national level governance factors because of the growing body of evidence relevant to development progress available at this level. Questions of global governance, however, are also key, as are the responsibilities of all actors involved in development - including multilateral institutions, the private sector and non-governmental organisations. There is strong interest in bringing this wider range of actors on board in a future framework, based on the recognition that they can help or hinder future development outcomes. More work is needed to identify the most viable options for doing so effectively.

As the UN and partners host their final meeting within the [global consultation on governance and post 2015 goals](#) this week, we argue that the approach taken in this area needs to be ambitious. But it must also leave behind the policy prescriptions and blueprints of the past. We need to recast the conversation by opening it up to new actors and debates, and thinking creatively about how to develop targets and indicators. We hope the ideas above make a useful contribution to this.



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² These conclusions are largely drawn from an unpublished review by the authors on the relationship between governance and MDG progress. For further information, please contact [Leni Wild](#) or [Gina Bergh](#).