Future of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs):
Perspectives from Pakistan
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Introduction
What does the fast approaching deadline for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) mean for Pakistan? What are the options for the post-2015 development agenda? What does the literature tell us about the best possible alternatives and how can we get there? This policy brief tries to touch upon a couple of such questions and provides a way forward on the discourse on global development agenda.

At the end of 2015 the MDGs will need a revision and we have yet to agree on refining or replacing them. Some people argue that the MDGs have not finished their work and should continue with MDGs 2nd Phase, or even just extending the deadline by a few more years. Others are arguing for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as an intellectual extension for the MDGs and to be used as a new idea in the development of all countries in the world. Though, there is a problem with advocating for the SDGs, they have yet to define their aims. So what exactly will the world be agreeing upon if they adopt the SDGs? Will that imply another alignment of national and sub-national budgets in line with SDGs (like the way we did for MDGs). One also needs to see the capacity issue which the MDGs are faced with. The capacity for the achievement of some indicators continues to remain weak. The demand side of reforms i.e. having a vibrant civil society that has a pull factor on reforms also remains weak at least in this part of the world.

Literature Review
The literature on the MDGs and the way forward once the 2015 deadline is reached, is predominantly been backed up and written by the United Nations and their affiliated organisations. Organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Children’s Fund, Food and Agriculture Organization, United Nations High Commission for Refugees, World Trade Organization, International Labour Organization, World Health Organization are the main sources that were used in their reports. They all either write their own reports or collaborate together on the progress of the MDGs. These organisations as well as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and government backed aid deals/donors are at the forefront of dealing with the MDGs and thus have written about the effects of their aid programmes.

Though the UN is not the only organisation that is looking into the post-2015 agenda, think tanks such as Institute of Development Studies (IDS) have written a working paper on the MDGs part 2. The main literature sources on hand are the UN and its affiliated organizations, think tanks from across the world who are focusing on aid and development, including environmental, social, economical, educational, and political development. These think tanks have put forward, from the reports by UN organisations, NGOs and IGOs, their own ideas on how to combat poverty and create sustainable development as well as focusing on the post-2015 agenda.

Pakistan’s Progress towards MDGs
If we are to look at how Pakistan is doing in regard to these goals and targets, the website www.mdgtrack.org has Pakistan lagging behind in all but one of the goals, Goal 3, Promote Gender equality and empower women. However, they are on track to meet Goals 1.Eradicate

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extreme Poverty and Hunger, 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases, and 8. Develop a global partnership for development, by 2020 and are unfortunately going to miss out on Goals 2. Achieve universal primary education, 4. Reduce child mortality, 5. Improve Maternal Health, and 7. Ensure environmental sustainability, by 2015 and 2020. Though Pakistan is not an isolated case, there are many countries around the world that will not be able to meet the MDGs by 2015.

Pakistan's progress had been quick during the mid-2000s, from 2002 until 2006 according to the UNDP in Pakistan. They outline in their report of 2010, that this was due to higher growth and an increase in donor aid, as well as the debt write off after 9/11. However, as a result of the global financial crisis of 2007, which dried up a lot of foreign aid that was needed by Pakistan to complete the MDGs, and the internal law and order problems which were aggravated in 2008 as the financial cost of fighting militancy escalated, less and less money was being allocated to the development of the poor of Pakistan. So the first suggestion by development partners has been for Pakistan to engage potential donors to fulfil their aid commitments towards MDGs. However, Pakistan itself needs to correct the supply side. The wastages in the aid absorption channels are now public knowledge. The key accountability mechanisms that keep a check on flow and stocks of aid are missing at the national as well as sub-national levels. The supply side improvements such as the civil services reforms have not been undertaken despite of reminders by the National Commission on Governance and later by Planning Commission of Pakistan. The attainment of MDGs without having clear results based management in place seems a long shot.

On-going Debates

Over the years many variants of MDG effort have come about. There is a project underway in Africa called the Millennium Villages Project. This was set up by the Earth Institute in Columbia University and the UNDP in August 2004 when they established the first Millennium Village of Sauri in Kenya and later a second village, Koraro in Ethiopia which was started in February of 2005. With the success of both of these villages the project was then expanded to 12 more villages in countries right across Sub-Saharan Africa. These villages were Bonsaaso in Ghana, Pampaidain in Nigeria, Mayange in Rwanda, Mwandama in Malawi, Potou in Senegal, Tiby in Mali, Mbolaa in Tanzania, Dertu in Kenya. The early results show that in these villages, Maize yields increased, improved drinking water, expanded access to HIV testing, reduction in malaria, free basic health care, and access to adult education.

Although these results have been deemed to be controversial, there have been claims which say that these villages will be able to complete the MDGs within the allocated timeframe. The challenge now is how can these results be scaled up? Will the effectiveness of this medium-term effort hold in the longer term?

The next option for the post-2015 developing world is the SDGs (as discussed above). These were initially chalked out by Columbia and Guatemala in 2011 and were presented at the 2012 Rio Summit as an alternative to the MDGs. The main theory behind the SDGs is that they will incorporate the three main pillars of sustainable development; economic, environmental, and social aspects of development. Though these SDGs have not been fully defined yet and because of this it will be hard to know exactly what they will cover. There are still questions being asked as to whether they will cover all countries in the world forcing them to be sustainable, economically and environmentally. Or if they will follow the way of the MDGs and will only cover countries that face development challenges and require a pro-poor approach. These SDGs do show some promise, if they are thought through properly, that they should cover what the MDGs could not and thus lead to a new development agenda for the world. Not
only is the content of the SDGs up for question but also the duration of these goals, should they follow the same route as the MDGs and have a definitive timeline, or will they be more open ended where they allow countries to follow their own timeline by each one's needs and ability. This also begs the question, what will the SDGs do for a country like Pakistan that the MDGs could not do, or did not cover?

There is one other option that could also replace the MDGs post-2015 agenda and that is rethink and modify the original MDGs so that it acknowledges the main failings of the MDGs and amends them, as well as to identify the gaps that have grown and put extra effort into filling said gaps. By doing this and re-introducing the MDGs, as the MDGs phase 2 or 2.0, could bring a new lease of life into the remainder of this first cycle and may entice member states to focus more on these last two years and try to complete the remainder of the MDGs or make a better effort at finishing them. The rejuvenation of MDGs will benefit the poor of the world and will show that there will be a need to continue with this development agenda.

Way Forward

Since the MDGs have been called a 'yard-stick' in terms of it being the first international agreement on aid, it has come a long way since then. So now the argument is what is the best way to move forward? Would it be any better in just having an MDG phase 2 with some of the main observations from the SDGs and Millennium Villages Project? Can there be an amalgamation of these three ideas?

The way forward for the post-2015 agenda is to focus discussions on what is needed to make the MDGs either better both in content and duration or, to think up ways to entirely replace them with a new idea such as the SDGs or the Millennium Development Villages. These discussions should, however, not take away from the remainder of the MDGs but should emphasise the importance of the MDGs. As there are discussions going on the SDGs, ordered by the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, at the moment, there should also be a parallel discussion on the other aspects for a post-2015 development agenda. These discussions could focus on not only the SDGs, but also a wide variety of agendas such as an amalgamation of the MDGs, SDGs, and the Millennium Villages Project. Or, the idea of promoting MDGs phase 2, or even just extending the deadline of the MDGs for those countries who need an extension, such as Pakistan, in order to catch up and then create a new worldwide agenda. However, there needs to be more research into what path is best taken so that it could have the most benefit for the poor of the world.

The government, civil society and the development partners in Pakistan must join hands in strengthening this post-2015 development discourse. Unless the roles and responsibility of each economic agent is known and the vision is shared, it will be difficult to contribute collectively towards a better future.