

The United Nation's post-2015 development agenda and leadership
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Summary by Brad Davis

While the United States is currently focused on international peace and security, the United Nations, as well as the majority of the planet, has shifted focus to more developmental goals, such as the eradication of poverty, sustainable development, and the betterment of human living conditions. As of 2015, the world has come close to or has achieved a number of the established 1990-2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The goals that were achieved are: portion of extremely poor peoples has been halved; enrollment of girls and boys in primary school is generally equal; HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis epidemics have been halted and infection rates have gone down; and five out of 10 people have access to clean drinking water. The four other goals of halving the under-five mortality rate, increasing the number of children in school in developing countries, decreasing maternal mortality rate by 45 percent, and the development of a global partnership for development have made some form of progress; goals are harder to attain as nations develop.

In 2015, a new set of goals was established called the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are arguably more vague and harder to define than the MDGs. The 17 goals are centered around sustainable development and furthering equality among the various groups across the globe. The major issue that arises from these goals is the similarity they share with one another. Since the number of UN members (now 193) has grown significantly since the creation of the original MDGs, more states have been given the opportunity to have input on what these newer goals should be. This creates an issue of goals that are relatively easy to achieve, accomplish little and are muddy across the board. The target date for completion of the SDGs is 2030.

The major issue facing the United Nations today is the over-complicated structure and high number of redundant organs within the UN system. These redundant bodies have led to a loss of inertia. The current UN structure is plagued by five weaknesses: competition; co-optation; a lack of coherence; capacity that is less than ideal; and complacency. There are a number of focus areas within the UN where there exists multiple organizations whose goals and purposes are barely distinguishable from each other – such as the high number of organizations for the betterment of equality for women – when it would be ideal to combine and trim down the number of organizations to maximize efficiency. In fact, trying to combine organs in the UN is time-consuming and headache-inducing, as exemplified by the combination of four entities to form UN Women, a process that took four years. In order to tackle the problems of today and tomorrow, the UN needs restructuring.

One suggested path to take would be limiting the term of the secretary general to a single, seven-year term instead of a single, renewable five-year term in order to give the secretary general a sense of urgency in completing important tasks and enacting restructuring policies. Another proposed change is treating the election of the secretary general like that of the American presidency. This would mean getting the approval of a wider global audience to increase influence of the secretary general. In conjunction with this, another reform could bring about better representation of the world's peoples by involving a more transparent and intense vetting process as part of the "1 for 7 billion" campaign. This campaign is the first step in allowing for the restructuring of the United Nations to increase the effectiveness of the various organs and eventually streamline the institution all together.