

The convergence debate: more than getting an efficient process

by [Andrea Rigon](#)

Since its inception, a key demand of the [Beyond2015 campaign](#) was that the process of defining a new framework for development to replace the MDGs would merge with the process of identifying a path to achieve sustainable development emerged from the RIO+20 summit. Apart from a few states, it seems very clear that the large majority agree that there should be a single process leading to one legitimate post-2015 development framework.

There have been several justifications for this. Without convergence, there would be the risk of fragmentation of political will and energy, with civil society and governments having to input into two policy arenas. There seems, therefore, a strong efficiency argument for merging the two processes. Moreover, the two processes, dealing with interrelated issues, may have created overlaps at the very least or, most probably, contradictions.

What I will try to convey in this short post is that merging the two agendas achieves more than just making the process more efficient and consistent. If the implications are carefully considered, eradicating poverty, while simultaneously taking planet boundaries seriously, is in itself a radical agenda for real transformation.

I would not have expected that one of the clearest arguments for the convergence would come from the World Bank. Jaime Saavedra-Chanduvi, the Acting Vice President of the World Bank's Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Network, emphasised the importance and the implications of integrating sustainability into poverty reduction. Without thinking about sustainability, it is potentially very easy to reduce poverty in the short-term. A government can run a huge deficit, indebting future generations, or reduce poverty by overexploiting natural resources and destroying the environment. It is only when you include a concern for sustainability, and put intergenerational solidarity at the centre of your thinking around poverty reduction, that you can identify appropriate policy.

In a finite world, this implies addressing a different but interconnected issue—inequality. In an honest and frank speech, Norwegian Minister of International Development, Heikki Holmås, said that fighting extreme poverty makes no sense without fighting extreme inequality. He added that the US was clearly not the model to follow because, quoting his conversation earlier in the week with Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz, 95% of the wealth created by the recent growth there was appropriated by 1% of the population.

Indonesia went a step further by making explicit an implication of this integrated agenda that many, particularly developed countries, would prefer not to hear. Kuntoro Magkusubroto, the Indonesian Chairman of National Committee on post-2015, convincingly argued that addressing the issue of sustainability and planetary limits means business as usual cannot continue. In particular, the world cannot continue with existing levels of consumption and lifestyles. Eradicating poverty and caring for sustainability means changing consumption patterns and the lifestyle choices of those using more than their fair share of

the world's resources. This implication makes the post-2015 discussions a **truly universal agenda**, meaning that action is required by both 'developing' and 'developed' countries and their populations.

But how far along are we? It was certainly not encouraging to see that even inside the UN, environmental sensibility is totally lacking. The UN canteen uses disposable plates, cups, containers and cutlery without proper recycling facilities. However, the conversation is ongoing and it has the potential to transform the global agenda. Let's hope it will soon turn into practice.