

Royal Society submission to the International Development Committee's inquiry into post-2015 development goals

The Royal Society welcomes the opportunity to respond to the *UK International Development Committee's Inquiry into Post-2015 Development Goals*.

The Society's contribution to international development

The Society has a history of contributing to debates on international development and the contribution that science can make to this important agenda: most recently, in its response to the *House of Commons Science and Technology Committee's Inquiry into Science and International Development* (December 2011) and *DFID's White Paper on Eliminating World Poverty: assuring our common future* (May 2009). The Society reiterates the value of science, engineering, technology and innovation in international development; the importance of building a stronger educational and research base; tackling climate change, food, water and energy insecurity; and strengthening governance mechanisms.

In its *People and the Planet* report on global population and consumption, published in April 2012, the Society emphasises the critical importance of bringing the 1.3 billion people living on less than \$1.25 per day out of absolute poverty, and reducing the inequality that persists in the world today; requiring focused efforts in key policy areas including economic development, education, family planning and health (<http://royalsociety.org/policy/projects/people-planet/report/> and Annex 1).

The Society also runs a number of innovative capacity building programmes, at individual and institutional levels, to help build sustainable research capacity in sub-Saharan Africa. These include recognising promising early-career scientists in Africa; contributing to the development of African scientific academies; promoting collaborative research projects between the UK and African countries; and facilitating free access to its scientific journals for the world's poorest nations (<http://royalsociety.org/about-us/international/capacity-building/>).

This document draws on the Society's previous work and has been approved on behalf of the Council of the Royal Society by Professor Martyn Poliakoff FRS, Vice President and Foreign Secretary.

Post-2015 MDG Framework

We are now at a critical time, both in terms of the state of the planet and the well-being of the world's human population. The world faces more challenges than ever before, from climate change, food, energy and water security, a growing population and increasing inequality. The post-2015 development agenda will define the direction of international development policy for at least the next decade. It will influence the way governments and other agencies around the world spend money on research and international aid to support national and regional development. It provides a critically important opportunity to mobilise support and drive progress in a sustainable and equitable way.

This submission does not answer every question posed by the Inquiry, as some areas are outside of the Society's expertise, but it sets out a number of observations and recommendations that should have some bearing on how the post-MDG framework is shaped.

1. The MDGs have been simple, memorable and to some extent quantifiable. Efforts made to achieve them have led to substantial reductions in child mortality and maternal deaths, for example; changes that are likely to have had wider beneficial effects on communities as a whole. But they have also been criticised for not being appropriately evidence-based; being over-simplistic and not reflecting the interdependencies between goals; setting inappropriate and/or incomplete goals, targets and indicators; and serving to marginalise missing areas (e.g. higher education and research) and downplay others (e.g. environmental sustainability). Food security is a rapidly growing concern, aggravated by population increase as well as climate change: investment in more research is urgently needed to address this issue¹.
2. Since the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were first developed, the world has become more multipolar and systems of governance more diverse; global challenges are ever more pressing; strengthening resilience is becoming a greater priority; and many poor people live in middle income countries, who are themselves serving as "donors" e.g. China and India. **A post-2015 development framework should reflect these global changes, building on existing goals and broadening them out to incorporate others, such as economic growth, governance, higher education and research.**
3. Responding to global challenges of the future will require recognition that these challenges cannot be addressed in isolation. The interconnectedness of global challenges requires a holistic, interdisciplinary and forward looking approach. **Any goals that are agreed as part of the post-2015 development framework should capture the need for improved integration of economic, environmental and social policy-making, and the respective roles of the public and private sectors. They should be built on the development of appropriate, scientifically robust goals, targets, indicators and review mechanisms, and they should be integrated with, and complement, the parallel development of the Sustainable Development Goals framework,** one of the key outcomes of the Rio+20 Earth Summit in June 2012.
4. To ensure that any new goals, targets and indicators remain relevant and meaningful for their lifetime, they will need to be forward looking and mindful of how the world might look in the decades to come. **They should take account of demographic trends and projections (e.g. urbanisation and population ageing) and the implications of these for resource needs (e.g. food or water goals) or capacity to provide services (e.g. health or education goals) and infrastructure (e.g. cities or transport).** The properly planned provision of water supply, waste disposal, power and other services in new and expanding cities will reduce slum conditions and increase the welfare of inhabitants, thereby reducing poverty. **Those goals designed to address security of resources should include the reduction of unsustainable consumption, improved efficiency, infrastructure and production practices.** Development and environment should not be considered as two separate issues.
5. The Society is an advocate for **evidence-based policymaking at all levels**, and encourages international policymakers to draw on the very best evidence available and engage with those at the forefront of excellent science. Indigenous research expertise is imperative to meet locally and regionally defined challenges, but higher education and research have been hitherto overlooked in development frameworks: the current focus on universal primary education has further exacerbated this and had a deleterious effect on the capacity and quality of teaching.

¹ <http://royalsociety.org/policy/publications/2009/reaping-benefits/>

6. The Society recognises the importance of **building indigenous scientific capacity in developing countries to help them to carry out their own demand-led research and be able to verify and exploit existing research delivered elsewhere, whilst also increasing the capacity for developing countries to engage in global discussions on global issues. This requires investment in a strong and diverse higher education system at all levels**, including building the institutional capacity of universities, research institutes and learned societies, and increasing the number of (post)doctoral students, researchers and teaching staff. The Royal Society has a number of schemes aimed at building scientific research capacity in sub-Saharan Africa. In August 2012, the Royal Society and the Department for International Development (DFID) announced a £15.3 million funding programme aimed at strengthening research and training capacity across sub-Saharan Africa by creating sustainable scientific networks².

Based on the Society's observations of international policymaking, such as the development of the MDGs and negotiations in the run-up to and at Rio+20, there are concerns that the best and most appropriate evidence is not always reaching those making policy decisions; as a result, policies are not as robust and sustainable as they should be. **The scientific community should play a much stronger role in informing discussions on international development and in helping to shape post-2015 development goals, targets and indicators.** This is recognised to some extent in the Rio+20 outcome document, *The Future We Want*, where emphasis is placed on development and transfer of technology and on improving the science-policy interface. The scientific community has a central role to play in both of these issues, and in facilitating information exchange and data accessibility, and building international research collaboration.

National science academies and learned societies can play an important role in identifying and convening experts to contribute to discussions on the post-2015 development agenda; organising themselves nationally, regionally and globally e.g. through the IAP – the global network of science academies, representing 105 academies around the world. The Society has worked with these academies on joint statements on issues as wide-ranging as building resilience to natural disasters, meeting energy needs and assuring water availability, the health of women and children, water and health, and innovation for development.

The Royal Society has a Fellowship of 1400 distinguished scientists drawn from all areas of science, engineering, and medicine. These scientists are a great source of knowledge and expertise and could play a vital role in defining the challenges and priorities. The Society has a back catalogue of policy work in sustainable and international development, including reports on the sustainable intensification of food crop production³, geoengineering the climate⁴, ground-level ozone⁵ and ocean acidification⁶. Most recently, it published a major report on the role of global population and consumption in sustainable development⁷. This report makes a number of recommendations that are directly relevant to the post-2015 development agenda (see annex 1).

For any queries about this submission, please contact:

Marie Rumsby
Senior Policy Adviser
Email: marie.rumsby@royalsociety.org
Tel: +44 (0) 207 451 2525
or

2 See <http://royalsociety.org/news/royalsociety-DFID-Africa-scheme/>

3 See <http://royalsociety.org/policy/publications/2009/reaping-benefits/>

4 See http://royalsociety.org/uploadedFiles/Royal_Society_Content/policy/publications/2009/8693.pdf

5 See <http://royalsociety.org/policy/publications/2008/ground-level-ozone/>

6 See http://royalsociety.org/uploadedFiles/Royal_Society_Content/policy/publications/2005/9634.pdf

7 See <http://royalsociety.org/policy/projects/people-planet/report/>

Tracey Elliott
Head of International
Email: tracey.elliott@royalsociety.org
Tel: +44 (0) 207 451 2549

Annex 1: People and the planet recommendations

1. The international community must **bring the 1.3 billion people living on less than \$1.25 per day out of absolute poverty**, and reduce the inequality that persists in the world today. This will require focused efforts in key policy areas including economic development, education, family planning and health.
2. The **most developed and the emerging economies must stabilise and then reduce material consumption levels** through: dramatic improvements in resource use efficiency, including: reducing waste; investment in sustainable resources, technologies and infrastructures; and systematically decoupling economic activity from environmental impact.
3. **Reproductive health and voluntary family planning programmes urgently require political leadership and financial commitment**, both nationally and internationally. This is needed to continue the downward trajectory of fertility rates, especially in countries where the unmet need for contraception is high.
4. **Population and the environment should not be considered as two separate issues**. Demographic changes, and the influences on them, should be factored into economic and environmental debate and planning at international meetings, such as the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development and subsequent meetings.
5. **Governments should realise the potential of urbanisation to reduce material consumption and environmental impact through efficiency measures**. The well planned provision of water supply, waste disposal, power and other services will avoid slums conditions and increase the welfare of inhabitants.
6. In order to meet previously agreed goals for universal education, policy makers in countries with low school attendance need to work with international funders and organisations, such as UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, IMF, World Bank and Education for all. **Financial and non-financial barriers must be overcome to achieve high-quality primary and secondary education for all the world's young, ensuring equal opportunities for girls and boys**.
7. Natural and social scientists need to increase their **research efforts on the interactions between consumption, demographic change and environmental impact**. They have a unique and vital role in developing a fuller picture of the problems, the uncertainties found in all such analyses, the efficacy of potential solutions, and providing an open, trusted source of information for policy makers and the public.
8. **National Governments should accelerate the development of comprehensive wealth measures**. This should include reforms to the system of national accounts, and improvement in natural capital accounting.
9. Collaboration between National Governments is needed to **develop socio-economic systems and institutions that are not dependent on continued material consumption growth**. This will inform the development and implementation of policies that allow both people and the planet to flourish.