

Proceedings of the DFID-DSA-EADI-ActionAid Policy Forum

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Abstract The main conclusions from the plenary sessions of the Policy Forum can be summarised as follows:

- focus must still remain on achieving the MDGs;
- developing country ownership of the new framework is essential and the approach must therefore be Southern-led;
- the obligations of the developed countries towards the achievement of the MDGs need clarification;
- international income and wealth redistribution should be a 'right' ('automatic' rather than discretionary), including international redistributive taxes and international inequality and its reduction should be given more emphasis;
- ethical and moral perspectives need emphasising within a global social justice, rather than a purely Indicator-driven, approach;
- 'fragile' states and global uncertainty need special treatment;
- the 'quality' of MDG achievements, rather than 'quantity', needs emphasising;
- the science and technology capacity of developing countries is critically important;
- processes which deliver the quantitative Indicators (MDGs) require more emphasis.

Serious research is needed to ensure the debate is well informed.

1 Introduction

This article provides an abridged record of the Policy Forum on 23 June 2009, in Brussels.¹

2 Opening plenary: what has been the impact of the MDG paradigm on poverty reduction?

Chair – Lawrence Haddad (President, DSA and Director, IDS, Sussex)

Salil Shetty (Director, United Nations Millennium Campaign)

Shetty argues that the MDGs should be de-linked from the international aid system. The MDG agenda needs to move away from being technocratic and statist, and MDG-related action should be 'local'. Furthermore, monitoring needs a higher priority in order to track progress and increase accountability. It is also necessary to identify what has worked, what has not, and where improvements can be made.

Rather than discussing an agenda for 'after 2015', while people are experiencing great difficulties at present due to the global economic

crisis it is more appropriate to discuss what we do before 2015. How do we mitigate from the effects of the crisis, were it to occur again. Where does this place a 'donor-driven' agenda? Shetty argues that the MDGs represent a counterpoint to the Washington Consensus.

The MDGs have limitations in that they are a public good. There are problems relating to their formulation and conceptualisation, the upshot of which can be a tendency to be technocratic, coupled with a statist view of the world. The MDGs appear to overlook or exclude human rights, and they are focused entirely on the developing world – there are no Targets for high-income countries. There are concerns that the MDG paradigm does not account for justice and equity, and that political economy is ignored. Shetty propagates a need for a focus on success rather than on the implications of the failure to achieve the Targets – that could have detrimental effects were the Goals not realised. In addition, there has to be a balance between

Table 1 Main features of the Washington Consensus and of the MDGs

	Mainstream 1990s (Washington Consensus)	UN conference agenda (MDGs)
Policy priorities	WC/macroeconomic stability; social investments; economic governance	Inclusive globalisation; social investments; economic governance; pro-poor growth; democratic governance
Development paradigm	Neoliberalism (WC/globalisation)	Basic needs, human development/capabilities; human rights; developmentalism
Partnership paradigm	Ownership and mutual accountability; MDGs; PRSPs; PRGF/HIPC	Ownership and mutual accountability; MDGs
International norms	Free market competition	End poverty; level playing field; equitable globalisation

Source Sakiko Fukuda-Parr PowerPoint presentation, available at: www.bit.ly/after2015

quantity and quality in the achievement of the Targets. Shetty illustrates some significant outcomes resulting from the MDGs so far – over 300 million people taken out of poverty since 2000; three million fewer children die each year – a total below ten million for the first time; more than 30 million additional children are in school, and two million people living with HIV have antiretroviral access (UN 2009).

However, there are crucial problems that must be tackled. These include a major economic crisis as well as the food and energy crises; the fact that child mortality is lagging behind; the quality of measures is important as opposed to merely quantity-gaining; 100 per cent primary enrolment is good but not if it is at the expense of the quality of teaching; and the quality of education and aid can be poor. The total global amount spent on arms in 2008 was US\$1.5 trillion, implying significant resourcing choices. In developing countries, the corruption issue often has to be addressed head-on, and mindless civil and international wars are ‘burning’ large amounts of money. Funds are available, but we often make the wrong choices. There needs to be a strong monitoring mechanism to make sure that the MDGs are implemented and delivered efficiently.

Enrico Giovannini (Chief Statistician, OECD)

Giovannini holds that we need, beyond the present MDG framework, to focus on the concept of equitable wellbeing. Furthermore, regarding MDG 8, information needs to be effectively transformed into knowledge in the era of online networking. In addition to these proposals,

Giovannini says that there needs to be a new narrative: the MDG discourse needs to be able to accommodate concepts such as equitable wellbeing.

Giovannini reasons that ‘there is a danger that the MDGs could become a straitjacket, with a contrast between national and international levels of discussion, process and analysis’. The MDGs do not presently have a negative role, but the absence of a clear conceptual framework is an issue that needs to be addressed. Although a single paradigm would be a great achievement, the knowledge–policy interaction has not been subjected to sufficient critical review. There are also issues of ownership, data, commitment and accountability.

Realising that although the MDGs are a public good, statistics and Indicators are too, and hence we may question whether there is too much attention to data and not enough to process. The original meaning of the word ‘statistics’ is ‘the science of the state’: statistics can help societies to make decisions. Although Indicators often do not match the associated concepts, international organisations are making progress in attempting to do so. In light of the view that politicians tend to quote only statistics which are favourable to them, the United Nations Statistics Commission focuses on statistical capacity building, aiming to improve the quality of developing country statistics – with significant success.

Statisticians have frequently been brushed aside by politicians, perhaps contributing to the lack of a sound conceptual basis for the MDGs.

However, they are regarded as a 'model' by policymakers. In the monitoring of the MDGs, and of socioeconomic development in general, emphasis tends to be on production of data rather than of *Information, Knowledge and Policies*. The logical chain linking these three elements has been broken. There is unclear ownership of data – and of accountability – a type of 'creative ambiguity'. Richard Manning (2009) has recently emphasised that we know little about the impact of the MDGs on this chain, and little about the impact of the chain on the MDGs.

Sakiko Fukuda-Parr (Professor in International Affairs, New School, New York)

Fukuda-Parr argues that the MDGs need to be internalised within the policy systems of developing countries, in order to translate global Targets into local Targets and policy measures. As well as this, elements of the human rights approach needs to be added to the MDGs. Most importantly, she holds, an explicit Goal for the reduction of inequality needs to be factored into the MDGs.

Fukuda-Parr questions the nature of the MDG paradigm, and whether it is within the paradigm of neoliberalism. Furthermore, she asks whether it is related to a paradigm of policy and planning or to one of partnership. Also, do the MDGs represent a form of global citizenship?

The main objectives of the MDGs are to end poverty and to improve the human condition. The motivation of the MDGs is the marginalisation of poor people, and the marginalisation of countries from globalisation. The basic policy thrust should be a search for a more inclusive form of globalisation that spreads the benefits more widely.

Fukuda-Parr goes on to compare the main features of the mainstream development agenda in the 1990s (Washington Consensus) with those of the UN conference addenda (MDGs), in terms of four key areas: policy priorities, development paradigm, partnership paradigm and international norms (Table 1).

Fukuda-Parr argues that the origins of the MDGs are diametrically opposed to the Washington Consensus, since it has the basic principles as equity, global partnership, and human wellbeing. There have been shifts in policy priorities: *high*

priorities are growth, income poverty, governance; *weaker priorities* are employment and hunger; and *neglected priorities* are democratic governance, global technology and pro-poor growth. Alongside neoliberalism, the 'basic needs' paradigm of the 1980s and 1990s amounts to a human rights approach and since the 1960s, 'development' has been regarded as a process whereby developing countries structurally transformed themselves and caught up with developed countries.

It is significant that cultural diversity and the principles of accountability, democracy and social values are rarely mentioned. The MDGs can be seen as a 'Faustian bargain': they have a powerful message but have tended to become the message itself.

3 Second plenary: what are the key meta-processes shaping development over the next 10–15 years?

Chair – Jean-Luc Maurer (President, EADI and Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva)

Charles Gore (Special Coordinator Cross-sectoral Issues, Division for Africa, Least Developed Countries and Special Programmes, UNCTAD)

Gore's presentation held that the MDGs should not be abandoned, but they have the opportunity to, and should, become 'rights'. What is required is a new consensus based on sustainable productive capacity as opposed to being grounded in the MDGs. Furthermore, wellbeing (poverty reduction) objectives should be built into such development Targets, which should also include taxes based on global transactions.

It is not simply instability that has affected the horizon of the MDGs, the significant game change has been, and is still, the financial crisis. There are contradictions in the current development trajectory and in the associated paradigm. Rather than being a development paradigm, the MDGs are simply a set of Indicators. The Keynesian model – with a focus on international development consensus – broke down at the end of the 1970s. 'The MDGs (as Indicators) are essentially the Washington Consensus with a Human Face' – based on the concept of 'Development Partnership'. The weaknesses inherent to this position are: market fundamentalism with a neoliberal approach; radical global income inequality; global interdependence without accountability; a socio-institutional mismatch.

Gore draws out the nature of radical global income inequality with the fact that the richest 1 per cent of people receive as much the poorest 57 per cent (the 50 million richest people receive as much as the 2.7 billion poorest).

Gore asks us to consider the Kondratieff cycle, which is made up of a 55–60 year cycle, which consists of ‘Summer’: 30 years of growth with inflation; ‘Autumn’: Crisis; ‘Winter’: 30 years of decline and deflation; ‘Spring’: Crisis. The way out of the Kondratieff Winter is technological innovation and the development of productive capacity. This cycle has implications for an MDG-plus Agenda, with adaptations needed for climate change and for global inequality. A key issue is ‘globally sustainable development’.

Alfred Nhema (Chief Executive, Pan African Development Centre)

(Please see Nhema in this *IDS Bulletin* for details.)

Richard Morgan (Director of Policy and Practice, UNICEF)

Morgan argues that we should rethink the urban versus rural paradigm in an integrated perspective, as we should not separate urban and rural poverty as it has been in the past – they are interconnected issues. Furthermore, the issue of physical protection needs to be addressed and incorporated into the MDGs as part of human development. There also needs to be the promoting of local ownership of, and national strategies for, the development Goals.

Many of the MDG Indicators relate to children, but the MDG discourse itself has little reference to children. In reference to the Millennium Declaration of September 2000 (UN 2000: paragraph 19), Morgan says that between the Declaration and the final version of the MDGs some references to children have been lost, including special assistance for orphans.

He argues that there are problems with the MDGs, in that they say little about ‘people’, and have insufficient emphasis on processes and strategies by which Goals are to be achieved and human rights realised. Previous speakers have quite rightly spoken about social protection, but physical protection is also of paramount importance to children. This point has been lost between the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs. The urban paradigm is also important,

with serious reflection about the significance of urban settlement patterns. We need to look beyond the rural paradigm alone to an integrated balanced one. The issue of failing states is another which needs more emphasis, and ‘failed states’ that sign up to the MDGs often lack legitimacy and impact.

Local ownership is a crucial principle, which is associated with the basic needs and human rights approaches. New information technologies give new potential to localisation within development processes. On top of this, there is concern over the exclusive use of household sample surveys in monitoring and evaluating MDG achievements. The results-based management system needs to be revisited with the design of better evaluation systems and use of participatory evaluative methods. Investment programmes should support the processes through which people survive, grow, learn and develop, as well as the infrastructure that facilitates these processes.

4 Concluding plenary: towards an MDG-plus agenda

Chair – Andrew Steer (Director General of Policy and Research, DFID)

Louis Kasekende (Chief Economist, African Development Bank)

Kasekende started by pointing out that we still have a long way to go in order to achieve the MDGs. There is much work to be done in order to improve and facilitate the pursuit of the Targets, including the need to focus on fragile states. MDG 7 needs to be broadened to include sustainability, and MDG 1 needs to be divided into wealth creation and lowering inequality. Regarding basic social services, a higher level of public expenditure/ODA is required, and this in turn shows the importance of the prioritisation, sequencing and coherence of financing. Targets are a means rather than an end in their own right and, for example, the quality of the measures and policies set to improve people’s lives should not be sacrificed at the expense of meeting quantity Targets. Furthermore, there is a need to mitigate the risks of external shocks, such as the global economic crisis, and food and climate crises.

Giovannini’s presentation warned that statistics are an issue in terms of both quantity and quality, for although progress has been made in both respects, there is still a long way to go. Targets need to be linked with policy instruments (and *vice*

versa) for Pro-Poor Policies, with a continuing need to improve donor coordination. Projects need to be better integrated into national development plans and policies. The MDGs will still be relevant after 2015, but they need rethinking. For example, in Kenya income inequality has led to social tensions and political upheaval – a move ‘backwards’ – it is well known that inequality breeds instability. The economic growth rate has fallen, with asymmetrical responses to external shocks jeopardising ten years of ‘progress’ within six months. It is necessary to find a way to mitigate external shocks.

A suggestion is to divide MDG 1 into two parts. The first part would focus on wealth creation as a prerequisite for redistribution, with a balance between infrastructure, health and education. The second part holds that lower inequality can promote stability. Another suggestion is to focus on fragile states such as the Congo, Sudan, Sierra Leone and Somalia. There is a risk of growth achievements being lost, for example Guinea Bissau and the drugs trade. There needs to be a concerted effort to recognise how we can address this. Furthermore, a good policy environment is a precondition for the achievement of the MDGs, and before fragile states are deemed to be ‘failed’, they need to be allocated aid. Another suggestion is to broaden MDG 7 to include sustainable growth with better definition of policy instruments. The balance between investment in social and economic infrastructure needs to be reconsidered, and to align instruments with their Targets. There are significant threats to sustainability that include climate change and external shocks. There also needs to be better definition of policy instruments.

Claire Melamed (Head of Policy, ActionAid)

Melamed emphasises that it is developing country governments which need to deliver the MDGs, and that funding mechanisms need to shift from uncertain ‘aid’ to more predictable redistributive mechanisms such as the Currency Transaction Tax (previously known as the ‘Tobin Tax’) providing funds based on rights rather than charity.

All of the issues being discussed need a broad context based in socioeconomic structures, with a need to: (a) mobilise resources for development and (b) to create the right incentives. Two overriding issues are: (i) power and politics and (ii) inequality. There is a need to look beyond aid

for a new and better narrative ‘after the MDGs’ in order to provide incentives for ‘development’. Achieving this type of change is a slow process.

There has been some success with resource mobilisation (e.g. the Gleneagles Agreement in 2005). Incentives, Targets and the organising framework are important, but the current agenda has been less than successful, ignoring the key realities of gender and power. We need to better understand the blocks to poverty reduction. Distributional issues have tended to be ‘slipped under the carpet’. There is a significant gender issue: women produce the most food but consume the least. Power relations and ‘politics’ are not adequately reflected in the MDGs and there is a need to move towards a ‘Global Welfare State’.

Statistics should focus less on averages, and more on distributions around the averages, with a higher profile for an underlying narrative about redistribution and increased attention devoted to individual rights to minimum levels of services and income. ‘Rights’ for individuals to a standard of living need to be established, not as a ‘charity’ but as domestic government and international obligations.

Yehualashet Mekonen (Coordinator, Information and Statistics, African Child Policy Forum)

(Please see Mekonen in this *IDS Bulletin* for details.)

Andreas Rechkemmer (International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change, United Nations University, Bonn)

Rechkemmer advises the development community to learn from past sociotechnological shifts. In order to progress, we need to design a metanarrative for the future incorporating uncertainty. As well as this, development of a new global governance system needs to be strongly prioritised.

The word ‘Anthropocene’ (disruption caused by human activity to the Earth’s climate and ecosystems) is highly relevant to the post-2015 MDGs. A new approach to global governance is needed for the ecosystem and human wellbeing. The post-2015 agenda needs to be changed radically with the main issues being equity, the MDGs and climate change. There is also a need to overcome the fragmentation of discourses and

to protect ecosystems, and major features of the global condition are high levels of uncertainty and change.

5 Sum up by the concluding plenary chair

Andrew Steer noted that it is crucial while debating the post-2015 agenda that we remain committed to achieving the MDGs. This must be our first priority. We need to address process and substance.

5.1 Process

- Moving forward, a coherent and coordinated approach is needed. The UK Department for International Development (DFID) believe the process needs to be Southern-led but is keen to engage support at both the substance and process level.
- The financial crisis has provided a political opportunity to move in new directions – this opportunity should be actively seized.
- Serious research is needed to ensure the debate is well informed.
- There is a need to synthesise where current debates are in a number of areas including:

Note

- 1 The full report of the forum is available with all background material at:

References

- Manning, R. (2009) *Using Indicators to Encourage Development: Lessons from the MDGs*, DIIS Report 2009:01, Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies
- UN (2009) *MDG Report 2009*, New York: United Nations

the strengths and weaknesses of the MDGs, global equity and vulnerability, approaches to measuring wellbeing, sustainability and security.

5.2 Substance

- A new and different narrative is needed.
- It is important for the new framework to be motivational and one where commitments can be clearly monitored.
- The new framework needs to be related to and relevant to country plans for local ownership to prevail.
- There is a need to build an integrated approach: combining the political dimensions, environmental sustainability, working with the private sector and citizens involvement to name just a few.
- The link between the MDGs and international development finance is already being debated; on the one hand ideally there should not be a link between the new framework and international financing, however past experience has shown us that the Goals can be useful in mobilising resources.

www.bit.ly/after2015 and www.eadi.org/fileadmin/MDG_2015_Publications/After_2015_Policy_Forum_Report.pdf

- UN (2000) *The United Nations Millennium Declaration*, General Assembly Resolution 55/2 of 8 September 2000, New York: United Nations, www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm (accessed 22 July 2009)