Richard Manning

Using indicators to encourage
development –
Lessons from the Millennium
Development Goals

DIIS Report 2009:01

USING INDICATORS TO ENCOURAGE DEVELOPMENT

LESSONS FROM THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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Richard Manning is an independent consultant on international development, and former Chair of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee. He commenced work on this paper while on an attachment to the Danish Institute for International Studies, and completed it with the support of the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom

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Abstract

The Millennium Declaration included a highly significant innovation – universal support by the world's governments for a short list of development results to be achieved by a set date. As the target year of 2015 approaches, the paper compares the MDG framework that emerged from the Declaration with other ways of measuring and incentivising progress, sets out some initial hypotheses about its impact and addresses issues about its structure and coverage. This leads to proposals about how to get the best value from the MDGs over the years to 2015 and five hypotheses about how the world might approach the issue of what framework, if any, to put in place to measure and incentivise development progress after 2015.

Executive Summary

1. The Millennium Declaration represented a hard-won consensus on how to tackle a range of difficult issues confronting the world, not least in the matter of how to promote sustainable development for the world's poor. Within the Declaration, the agreement on a few measurable targets for achievement, in most cases by 2015, was a notable step, and their translation into a structured framework of Goals, Targets and Indicators created a distinctive approach to encouraging development and international support for it. The purpose of this framework is taken as being *'to encourage sustainable pro-poor development progress and donor support of domestic efforts in this direction'.*

2. The use of indicators to measure and incentivise progress is a matter of widespread interest, and there is growing international discussion of good practice in this area. Against that background, the purpose of the present paper is to assess the impact of the MDG framework, and to consider whether there are features of it that have been either of particular value or problematic for achieving positive impacts.

3. The question of whether the MDG framework has had any influence in changing behaviour and so influencing outcomes in the desired direction is fundamental. The paper notes that this question is hard to answer, both because of a lack of research and evaluation, but also because it is intrinsically difficult to distinguish the impact of the MDG framework itself from the strands of thinking that helped to create it. It hypothesises nevertheless that the framework has been very influential in international discourse about development, a useful tool for advocacy, and a positive influence on data collection. Its impact on the donor community appears to be quite varied. Not enough is known about its impact on policies and resource allocation in developing countries. Evidence from Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers shows a good deal of rhetorical support for selected aspects of the framework, but translation into actual resource-allocation appears to be weak in many cases. The MDGs would appear likely to have more impact in aid-dependent countries than others, given the support by many donors, but this raises questions of local ownership. Distinguishing the impact of the MDGs at field level from other influences would be very hard, but there is some evidence that their existence has amplified attention to the development issues they highlight.

4. How well designed is the MDG framework to achieve positive impacts? The report considers that the positive features of the framework include its structure (notably the limited number of Goals), and period of implementation (in effect fifteen years). It finds the areas chosen to be appropriate in themselves, but highlights two major concerns: on the one hand that important dimensions of poverty present in the Millennium Declaration itself are missing from the framework (e.g. empowerment, rights, governance) or marginalised (e.g. inequality), and on the other that the strong focus on social sectors may skew resources away from a development path of more rapid growth and less aid dependence – a balance that each country needs to strike for itself. It notes a number of problems concerning individual Goals, Targets and Indicators, including over-narrow interpretations of which activities support achievement of the Goals, and recognises that, at global level, the pace of progress implied by the goals appears to be unduly modest in respect of poverty-reduction and too demanding for some of the other goals. The latter feature is highlighted when the goals are applied at regional and country level, where they do indeed provide a very useful benchmark and monitoring framework, but are unlikely to be generally appropriate as a framework for planning. Adaptation is therefore to be preferred to simple adoption. The MDGs, like many other indicator sets, are good servants but bad masters.

5. Against this background, the paper considers how to get the best value out of the MDG framework in the period to 2015, particularly in the context of the present severe economic downturn. It highlights the significance of good information on the real situation at country level, and the continuing value of the framework, both in monitoring progress and setbacks, and in encouraging continued international support for pro-poor development outcomes. A clear narrative about both successes and failures is needed, and the pragmatic application of the framework at country level should continue to be encouraged.

6. Finally, the paper makes five hypotheses concerning whether to support a further MDG-type set of indicators after 2015. These are that:

- there is a prima facie case for a further set of indicators designed to encourage the effective tackling of the problem of absolute poverty in all its aspects, and also to encourage international support for it, but this needs to be tested against a more 'one-world' approach that would be aimed more at encouraging policy-makers in every country to give greater weight to tackling systemic global issues, of which absolute poverty would be just one;

- the MDG framework also needs to be tested against the experience of other ways of tracking and incentivising progress;
- within whatever methodological approach might be chosen, attention should be paid to the main critiques concerning areas missing from the present MDG framework, while maintaining the parsimonious approach to the number of Goals and Targets that appear to have been vital for the impact of the MDGs;
- in each chosen area, much work would be needed to establish what targets/indicators (depending on the overall architecture chosen) and what degree of 'stretch' would be appropriate;
- work needs to start soon on developing a consensus on the purpose, method, areas and responsibilities of any post-2015 paradigm, so that sufficient time is left for a serious and evidence-based discussion by individual policy communities on what the appropriate targets/indicators might be in their area of competence.

Introduction

1. The establishment, in the Millennium Declaration of the UN General Assembly in 2000, of a brief set of goals for achievement by a target date represented a new departure in international thinking about how to encourage the progress of developing countries, and indeed of societies at large, and was one to which all countries, both developed and developing, committed themselves.

2. The purpose of this paper is to make a preliminary assessment of the impact of the Millennium Development Goals which emerged from the (much broader) Declaration, and to draw emerging lessons from the experience so far with the MDG framework with a view to considering:

   a) how to get the best value out of the existing framework over the period to 2015; and
   b) whether to encourage some sort of international framework for incentivising development progress after 2015 and, if so, on what basis.

3. There are compelling reasons for undertaking such a study. In the first place, the MDG framework is an internationally endorsed selection of parameters, organised against a small number of headline goals, which are intended (see paragraph 9 of Section 1 below) to encourage positive change, particularly for the world's poor, and increased international support for it. This is only one of a large number of possible and actual approaches to *how* to measure and encourage progress, and is well worth comparing to other approaches. It is important to know whether the adoption of this framework has had any *impact*, and, if so, what this impact has been. It is particularly important to assess whether features of the design (i.e. *what* is measured and how the measures are structured) have been more or less effective in encouraging sustainable and broad-based development, or whether indeed some features may have had counter-productive effects.

4. As the facts on the ground become clearer, it is evident that progress against the Goals is patchy, with many examples of rapid progress, but also significant areas where countries and whole regions are well off-target for many of the Goals. This raises important questions about how the Goals can continue to provide useful incentives for progress and international support over the period to 2015.

5. Finally, as 2015 approaches, international political attention will undoubtedly turn to the question of whether the Goals should be modified, discarded or replaced, and if so, by what sort of framework, for what sort of period and with what sort of characteristics. This raises questions which deserve careful reflection.

To this end:

Section 1 of the present paper describes the MDG framework, Annex 1 contains a full list of the current Goals, Targets and Indicators, and Annex 2 gives a brief history of how the Goals came into being.

Section 2 compares the MDG framework with other approaches with similar objectives, including current international initiatives.

Section 3 makes a very preliminary assessment of the impact of the MDG framework to date, and indicates how this assessment can be deepened. It distinguishes the impact of the MDG paradigm on the international discourse about development; on advocates and opinion-formers; on decision-makers in donor countries and developing countries at different levels of development; and on data-monitoring and analysis. It puts forward some very tentative arguments about impacts on the ground.

Section 4 draws some preliminary lessons from experience of the MDG framework to date, taking account of its strengths and weaknesses and of the experience of other approaches to measuring progress.

Section 5 considers the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for the continued impact of the Goals in the period to 2015, not least in the light of the present global economic downturn.

Section 6 considers the implications of these findings for discussion of ways of measuring progress in the future if an effective framework for measuring and encouraging development progress is to be continued beyond 2015, and considers what procedural steps might be taken to promote such a discussion.[1]

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[1] Please see acknowledgements on p. 2.

Section 1: What is the MDG Framework?

1. In September 2000, the UN General Assembly agreed at a Summit session to the terms of a 'Millennium Declaration'. This stated that 'the central challenge we face today is to ensure that globalization becomes a positive force for all the world's people', set out a short list of fundamental values (freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility) and identified a number of key objectives in the fields of peace, security and disarmament; development and poverty eradication; protecting the environment; human rights, democracy and good governance; protecting the vulnerable; meeting the special needs of Africa; and strengthening the United Nations. The Declaration was therefore a broad agenda for action on many of the more troublesome issues facing the international community, and the consensus achieved with respect to it was a significant step.

2. The Declaration included many objectives. A notable feature of almost all of them was that no timetable was set for their achievement, though the General Assembly was asked to review progress on a regular basis. However, one paragraph under 'Development and Poverty Eradication' was constructed on a very different basis. It read as follows:

   'We resolve further:
   - To halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of the world's people whose income is less than one dollar a day and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger and, by the same date, to halve the proportion of people who are unable to reach or to afford safe drinking water
   - To ensure that, by the same date, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and that girls and boys will have equal access to all levels of education
   - By the same date, to have reduced maternal mortality by three quarters, and under-five child mortality by two thirds, of their current rates
   - To have, by then, halted, and begun to reverse, the spread of HIV/AIDS, the scourge of malaria and other major diseases that afflict humanity
   - To provide special assistance to children orphaned by HIV/AIDS
   - By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers as proposed in the 'Cities without Slums' initiative.'

This paragraph stands out for its use, except in the penultimate bullet point, of time-bound targets.

3. In December of the same year, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare a 'road map' of how to implement the Declaration. The Secretary-General set out such a road map in September 2001 (General Assembly document A/56/326). An annex to this document, reflecting consultations among members of the UN Secretariat and UN system more broadly and representatives of the IMF, OECD and the World Bank, set out what has become the definitive list of the eight Millennium Development Goals. The Goals were:

    1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
    2. Achieve universal primary education
    3. Promote gender equality and empower women
    4. Reduce child mortality
    5. Improve maternal health
    6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
    7. Ensure environmental sustainability
    8. Develop a global partnership for development

4. The Goals are the apex of a structure that, as set out in the same Annex, also contained 18 targets, with specific dates for achievement, except in the case of Goal 8, and 48 indicators, which either measured the targets directly or added a related dimension. The Goals have remained unchanged since 2001, but additional targets were added (for reproductive health, for access to HIV/AIDS treatment, and for loss of biodiversity, together with revising and re-locating the target for employment) following the UNGA Summit Session of 14-16 September 2005. Indicators have not been subject to any formal intergovernmental process, but are set and adapted by the Inter-agency and Expert Group on the Millennium Development Goal Indicators (IAEG).[2] Since 2005, indicators are also presented to the UN Statistical Commission, whose role is, however, limited to considering discrepancies and technical aspects. (The UN Statistical Commission does not have a role in the selection of indicators.) They are then 'noted' by the relevant UNGA resolution. The entire framework, effective January 2008, contains 21 Targets and 60 Indicators. It is given at Annex 1. In this paper the phrase 'MDGs' is used to cover the goals and targets, the phrase 'MDG framework' to cover the entire system.

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[2] The IAEG is described in more detail in Annex 2, paras 67-69.

5. The MDGs have become a prime point of reference in UN and other international discourse about the progress of development, and have been visible to different degrees at national level in both donor and developing countries. The question of their real-world impact is considered in Section 3 below.

6. Formal UN communications and resolutions have usually adopted the phrase 'the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals' in referring to the MDGs. This cumbersome phrase is designed to accommodate both the US, which expressed reservations[3] on the annex to the UN Secretary-General's Road Map document of September 2001, and the various bodies and policy communities which had agreed additional goals not included in the MDGs and its supporting targets and indicators. However, in this study, the focus will be on the Millennium Development Goals themselves, together with the supporting targets and, where appropriate, indicators.

7. The background to the adoption of the MDGs is complex and interesting. Most had their origin in the series of major UN sectorally focused conferences from 1990 (Jomtien Conference on Education) to 1995 (World Summit on Social Development, Copenhagen), and were drawn together through a process at the OECD Development Assistance Committee in 1995/96, which in turn led to their inclusion in the Millennium Declaration at the UN General Assembly in 2000. Annex 2 sets out the story briefly. The history is important in explaining a number of features of the eventual structure and content agreed in 2000/01.

8. Some particular features of the MDG framework deserve early mention.

9. The first is that the *purpose* of the MDG framework is a key question, one not made explicit in the key documents of 2000/01, where some 'creative ambiguity' may have facilitated agreement. More recent documents do attempt to define its role. For example, in the 2008 UN Report on the MDGs, they are said to 'encapsulate the development aspirations of the world as a whole' and to be 'a

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[3] These reservations were, first, that Goal 8, while ostensibly about partnership, focused only on the donor side, including the 0.7% target for ODA as a proportion of GNI, while failing to include any governance indicators; and secondly, that the US saw the annex to the road-map as a UN Secretariat backroom target-setting exercise that went well beyond the Millennium Declaration, had serious doubts that the targets were operational enough to be implemented at country level, and felt that issues such as democracy and good governance had not been captured. Reservations were also expressed by some developing countries, not least on the perceived lack of specificity of the obligations of developed countries under Goal 8.

framework for the development activities of over 190 countries in ten regions', as well as 'a framework for international development cooperation'.

10. It is clear that *the MDG framework was conceived in the context of encouraging development and the reduction of poverty*, *seen as a multi-dimensional issue,* drawing on previous approaches to highlighting 'basic needs', and not least on the Human Development paradigm developed in the 1990s. As Jean-Michel Severino has argued,[4] the MDGs could be seen as setting out *the elements of a basic safety-net* for poor people – a set of conditions of life below which no one should be expected to live. They could equally be seen as designed to *underpin the case for continued aid for poverty reduction* – something very much in the minds of those who drew the first set of Goals together in the DAC in 1995/96 – and more broadly for policies in rich countries that assist development progress. (It is unfortunate that much of the discussion about the Goals has underplayed the significance of policies in favour of a strong focus on aid volume, important though the latter is.) In this paper, my basic hypothesis will be that the purpose of the MDG framework is *to encourage sustainable pro-poor development progress and donor support of domestic efforts in this direction.* These two different but related purposes underlie most of the discourse about the Goals.

11. Two significant points derive from the context in which the MDGs were put forward.

12. The first is that *the focus of the MDGs is in practice mostly on the developing countries,*[5] even though the annual MDG Reports also provide much data on developed countries and on the world as a whole, and reporting is on this basis. Indeed the 2008 report states explicitly that 'the MDGs are universal: they are intended to embrace not only all countries but also all people within each country', and the UN Secretary-General in his introduction notes that 'they encompass universally accepted human values and rights, such as freedom from hunger, the right to basic education, the right to health and a responsibility to future genera-tions'. There is therefore also a global agenda underlying the framework, but the framework is for the most part applied in the context of development. One key

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[4] See, for example, his blog at http://www.ideas4development.org/millennium-development-goals-looking-beyond-2015/en/

[5] The targets and indicators in Goal 8, by contrast, are designed to measure and encourage the response by developed countries, though interestingly a number of middle-income countries have also filed 'MDG8 Reports', which set out how they too are taking account of the needs of poorer countries.

question is whether a 'developmentally oriented' framework is to be preferred to one more consciously aimed at countries at all stages of development. Section 2 gives several examples of other approaches which are being applied, or are under discussion in, countries at all stages of development. Some commentators have in fact criticised the MDG framework as encouraging the belief that people in rich countries can largely avoid making changes in their own life-styles in the interests of a fairer world.[6]

13. The second is that, in attempting to *create an incentive for more rapid progress,* the MDG framework falls squarely within a long and controversial tradition of setting demanding (and sometimes frankly unrealistic[7]) goals at the international level in the hope of changing real-world outcomes in a positive direction. What makes the MDG framework particularly interesting is that it has achieved much greater visibility than most previous such attempts (how many can recall the sequence of UN Development Decades, for example?). Has this greater visibility led to any results that can be credited, at least in part, to the existence of the MDG framework? Section 3 attempts to tackle this question.

14. Another feature worth mentioning at the outset is that there has been some lack of consistency regarding whether the Goals should apply to the 'universe' of developing countries as a whole, or to individual countries and regions. For example, the DAC, when devising the 'halving poverty' Goal in 1996, deliberately set it at global level, since it was not considered something feasible for every country (though at the same time identical infant- and child-mortality targets for all countries were accepted). The Millennium Summit Declaration, quoted above (paragraph 2) did not imply that the Goals should be simply applied at regional or country level.[8] In his 'Road Map' report to the General Assembly in September 2001, however, Kofi Annan said: 'It is crucial that the millennium development goals become national goals and serve to increase the coherence and consistency of national policies and programmes'. This is a natural approach from the point of view of encouraging progress (how satisfied would we be by some achievement at global level that leaves many countries miles off track?), but it clearly sets a more demanding standard than a global target. It is also one of the key reasons for questions about whether the Goals are being applied in an unduly mechanistic way. The implications

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[6] See Saith (2006).
[7] See Clemens, Kenny and Moss (2004).
[8] Apart from universal primary education, where the nature of the goal requires every country to succeed.

of this *interplay between the global, regional and national levels*[9] are considered in Section 4 below.

15. A further feature to bring out is that any indicator set necessarily oversimplifies the complex nature of what it seeks to measure - in this case, some of the many dimensions of sustainable pro-poor development. From the outset, there have been concerns that *the MDGs present too simplistic a picture of a complex reality*. For example, they could encourage either narrowly 'sectoral' approaches to outcomes (e.g. better health) that require interventions going well beyond a single 'sector', or too narrow a selection of objectives within a sector (e.g. an implicit downgrading of the importance of secondary and tertiary education). This is perhaps less a criticism of the MDG framework than of the way in which it has been interpreted and used. Again the arguments are examined further in Section 4 below, and some lessons drawn for the use of the framework in Section 5.

16. Finally, the Millennium Declaration represents an extremely important consensus of all the world's governments[10] in favour of the specific, time-bound objectives which it set out. This means that the Declaration has managed to span all sorts of different political systems and ideologies.[11] Some would indeed see it as a positive sign that, over time, there has been a greater willingness to seek convergent solutions to problems of global scope, though others may fear that the consensus was achieved by avoiding any really controversial directions.

17. This consensus gives the Goals a particular status internationally as a rallying point for development,[12] and is undoubtedly a principal reason why, nearly a decade later, they continue to be at the centre of much of the discourse about development. The fact that there are many technical arguments about the MDG Framework should not obscure the political importance of this consensus. Indeed, it can be argued that there is a trade-off between obtaining political support (which typically requires compromise) and achieving some theoretical optimum which may prove impossible to negotiate.[13] From this perspective, a

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[9] Sub-national levels are also important. Brazil and other countries have set MDG-based targets at these levels.

[10] And, as Annex 2 makes clear, with the support of the Bretton Woods Institutions, which had paid very little attention to the successive Development Decade targets, which had been seen as engaging essentially the UN at institutional level.

[11] As indeed the DAC Goals of 1996 were approved in the UK by a Conservative Government and then became the centre piece of the strategy of an incoming Labour Government (see Annex 2).

[12] They should not be seen as a strategy, a point emphasised in Black and White (2004).

[13] See for example, Hulme (2008).

critical analysis of the specifics of the MDG paradigm could be seen as missing the point. As against this, if some features of a political compromise should turn out to have counter-productive effects, these do need to be examined. The paper attempts to recognise both these perspectives.

Section 2: How does the MDG FRAMEWORK compare to other approaches to measuring the progress of societies?

18. There is a huge and rapidly growing literature about how to measure the progress of societies. The effort to do so is not without controversy, and sceptics may argue that it is too readily taken for granted that progress can be measured, and/or that measuring it brings some value added in a better understanding of what 'progress' is about. There are also many questions about the potential of measurement in incentivising change. However, an understanding of this broader context seems to me essential in trying to assess the MDG framework. This section will restrict itself to attempting to indicate some of the main approaches as a basis for situating the MDG framework in a wider context.

19. We may start with a simple typology to help distinguish among the many approaches to measuring and incentivising progress.

20. *First, a distinction needs to be made between targets and indicators*. Indicators establish one or more parameters against which progress can be measured. Targets typically set desired achievements against such indicators to be met by some date, thus giving them an explicit incentivising purpose. Indicators themselves may, however, also have such a purpose: indeed 'league tables' are very frequently used with a view to driving up performance by 'horizontal benchmarking' – as, for example, with the OECD's 'PISA' rankings of educational achievement. These do not set levels of achievement by some target date, but rather an open-ended competition between the benchmarked systems. (They therefore set no upper limit on achievement, whereas targets give incentives to hit but not to surpass the level indicated.)

21. *A second broad distinction is between approaches that measure one parameter alone* (typically based on National Accounts, such as GNI, or GNI adjusted for factors such as sustainability) *and those that measure several dimensions of progress separately,* such as the MDGs. For those in the second category, *an important further distinction is between approaches that combine the information from such parameters into an index* through some weighting mechanism (e.g. the Human Development Index) *or, as*

with the MDGs, to display the information without any weighting between the parameters.[14] [15]

22. *A distinction is also useful between 'objective' and 'subjective' measures of progress*, the former (such as the MDGs) reflecting outputs or outcomes,[16] the latter being based on asking people for their own judgements about their experience, their degree of satisfaction, or, based on Amartya Sen's work, on whether they are able to act meaningfully in pursuit of their goals.[17]

23. *A further distinction is that between goals and indicators set at a level above the operational unit, and those set by the operating unit (or stakeholder group) itself*. Thus on the one hand higher levels of authority (e.g. national governments) frequently set standards for local institutions (e.g. schools) in a process that may be consultative (and could, for example, involve subjective as well as objective measures), but is ultimately determined by the higher level of authority. On the other hand, local communities can set their own measures of wellbeing,[18] and the work of the OECD Project on 'Measuring the Progress of Societies' (see below) has a remarkable number of examples of 'bottom-up' goal-setting. The MDG framework is somewhat ambiguously positioned in this respect. To the extent that it was originally put forward as applying to the universe of countries as a whole[19] and agreed by the UN General Assembly, it could be seen as an example of goal-setting by the stakeholder group concerned. However, to the extent that it is being used to assess individual states, it would be more of a top-down instrument. The second interpretation seems to accord more with the reality of lists of countries which are 'on-track' or 'off-track' for each Goal. Of course, this is not to deny that countries can, and do, set themselves goals that are specific to their own situations, for example a local poverty line rather than the international one used in the MDGs.

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[14] UNDP regularly catalogue such composite development indices. Their latest report (Bandura (2006)) lists 165, and points out that 50% of these were created in the previous five years.

[15] Most composite measures aggregate first across people and then across domain. But it is also possible to aggregate the other way, and thus assess, for example, how many households are below target levels in a particular number of domains at once, a valuable way of targeting the most deprived (information from Sabina Alkire).

[16] The MDG paradigm also includes inputs, of course, notably in Goal 8. It does not contain any subjective indicators.

[17] Sen himself favours the use of objective as well as subjective indicators, pointing out that poor people can have extremely low expectations, so that use of subjective indicators alone may well seriously understate the deficiencies in their quality of life.

[18] See, e.g., Helle Munk Ravnborg (1999).

[19] More precisely, as noted in Section 1, for most Goals, applying to the universe of developing countries, for Goal 8 principally to the developed countries and for Target 7A to all countries.

24. The MDGs therefore fall into the category of:

- targets rather than indicators,
- multiple, not single,
- separately displayed, not combined into an index,
- objective rather than subjective, and
- top-down rather than bottom-up.

25. The approach enshrined in the MDGs – the desired simultaneous achievement of certain measurable results by a certain date – has a number of parallels in both international discourse (e.g. the 'Lisbon' targets for the competitiveness of the European Union) and at national levels - and probably even more at the institutional and firm levels.

26. The MDG framework also builds on the longstanding experience of setting goals within the development agenda. Such goals have been set, often following complex negotiations, not only at sectoral level (as in the conferences that gave rise to individual MDGs and in the quite successful use of targets for reducing child mortality set by UNICEF and WHO in the 1980s), but also in a more cross-cutting manner, as in the 'Development Decades' of the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, or the successive resolutions about Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The MDG framework is, however, exceptional in this context by reason of the limited number of Goals, even though the number of indicators is still considerable.

27. The MDGs are only one of very many ways to capture 'progress'. In considering the MDG framework, it is useful to look at some current international initiatives to advance the debate about how best to do this, and to do so in societies at all levels of development. They build, of course, on much pre-existing work, for example, on 'Green GDP' and the Human Development Index, or the Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI) devised by Jim Grant and Morris Morris, which generated interesting methodological approaches but never gained much political traction.

28. Two of these initiatives have particular interest because of their breadth and the significance of the issues that they are discussing. These are the OECD-hosted project on Measuring the Progress of Societies, and the Commission on the

Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress established by President Sarkozy of France.

29. The *OECD-hosted 'Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies*[20] has brought together information about a remarkable number of initiatives which seek to measure (and in many cases also to incentivise) changes in the well-being of communities, regions or states. The project has three main goals:

- *What to measure?* The project is developing methods and guidelines to assist the debate over what progress means in different societies.
- *How to measure progress?* The project is developing best practice on how to measure progress and its component parts, recognising that some are not well-measured by existing statistical indicators. It aims to 'foster the integration of the current top-down approach to the development of international indicators with a bottom-up effort, to take into account cultural, social and economic differences around the world'.[21]
- *Ensuring that these measures are used.* The project considers that new ICT tools offer huge potential here, and the project is itself developing new tools.

30. The project is working on cross-cutting issues, such as the characteristics of successful indicators, which have important potential applicability to consideration of the MDGs, and to which an assessment of the MDG framework can in turn contribute.[22]

31. At the 'World Forum' on measuring the Progress of Societies, held in Istanbul in 2007, three conclusions were reached which are relevant to considering the issue of measuring development progress:

   a) A single definition of progress seems difficult to reach and probably not desirable, since it would disregard important differences in the picture.
   b) Measurement of social progress should go beyond economics to include economic, social, environmental and well-being elements.

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[20] See www.oecd/progress for further details.

[21] Global Project Strategic Action Plan, as approved by the OECD Committee on Statistics June 2008.

[22] The report (Scrivens and Basiello (2008)) concludes with four general lessons for anyone developing indicator sets: be clear about your objectives and how you expect to achieve them; be realistic about what an indicator set can achieve; never underestimate the importance of the process of designing and agreeing the indicators; and think long-term: be persistent and flexible.

c) Statisticians, policy-makers and representatives of communities need to work together to improve the quality and relevance of national/international statistics and transform them into an important tool in the design of better policies promoting progress. Benchmarking efforts should go hand in hand with better communication with governments.

32. *The 'Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress'* was established by President Sarkozy in 2008, being chaired by Joe Stiglitz and having Amartya Sen as its Adviser. The starting point for the Commission is the large gap that is thought to exist between standard measures of socio-economic variables and popular perceptions of well-being. Its aim is to identify the limits of GDP as an indicator of economic performance and social progress, to consider additional information required for the production of more relevant indicators, to discuss how to present this information in an appropriate way, and to assess the feasibility of alternative measurement tools.

33. The Commission has set up three strands of work, namely:

- Possible extensions to the classical GDP measure (for example, household disposable income, distributional aspects, improving the measurement of non-market services and non-market production by households, wealth, security)
- Sustainable development and environment (the contribution of the environment to current well-being, and sustainability in all its dimensions)
- Quality of life (identifying areas where credible measurement is possible, looking at elements which are good in themselves and those which are a means of obtaining elements with an intrinsic value).

34. The Commission intends to suggest alternative indicators which may provide a better description of economic performance and social progress than existing measures of this sort. An Issues Paper for the Commission[23] notes that there is a trade-off concerning how many measures to propose: a large number of indicators may be useful in reflecting diversity but could provide a confusing picture, but a single figure which mixes a large number of socio-economic phenomena provides an inadequate basis for appropriate policy measures.

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[23] Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress (2008).

35. Two elements of particular interest under the 'quality of life' heading are:

- identifying indicators of inequalities for the different dimensions of quality of life. The Commission wants to find ways of capturing the diversity of experience among the people in any society, and notes that appropriate methods may differ across different domains (e.g. gaps in educational competencies of low and high achievers, health status of different socio-economic groups). It also notes that looking at indicators on an indicator-by-indicator basis may not provide a true measure of the extent of inequality within society.
- assessing different approaches to combining information across Quality of Life domains. For example, some measures, such as the Human Development Index, aggregate measures of average conditions, whereas it may be preferable to look at individuals' experience with respect to what is being measured. People's hedonic experiences can be assessed through some common yardstick, or else various systems of ranking can be used.

Both of these pieces of work could be significant in considering how to measure development progress.

36. The Commission is due to adopt its report in April 2009. Its findings may be directly relevant to consideration of the future of the MDG framework: equally, lessons learned from that framework may be useful to the Commission.

37. Both these initiatives – and there are many more, including an initiative on benchmarking by the World Economic Forum – are in principle not limited to the needs of societies at a particular level of development, though much of the discussion so far has turned on practice in developed countries. The MDG framework, as noted above, has been agreed in the context of 'development', and in particular the reduction of poverty, applying not simply an income approach, but one that recognises some of the other multiple dimensions of poverty. Its focus has thus been on what might be regarded as very basic requirements of a decent life – income above the absolute poverty level, a few years of education, improved standards for child and maternal health, access to clean water etc. But many of the issues that confront societies at every level of development have their resonance in considering the lessons to be learned from the MDG framework. It would be a mistake for the 'development community' to ignore experience in using indicator sets to encourage change in other contexts.

38. However, in considering the relevance of some of these initiatives to the situation of poor people in poor countries, attention needs to be paid to very practical issues about the availability of data. As pointed out in Section 3 below, the MDG framework itself has shown how weak much of the evidence base is, even for some of the basic facts and figures it requires (maternal mortality being a striking example). In countries where vital statistics are simply not available, sophisticated measures of progress may be thought of little relevance (though the increasingly comprehensive availability of survey data shows that there are ways of obtaining much better information than in the past). There are certainly strong grounds for ensuring that any systems for measuring the progress of societies are consistent with the ability to produce reasonably reliable data locally.

Section 3: What has been the Impact of the MDG FRAMEWORK thus far?

39. While Section 2 shows an active international discussion of alternative approaches to measuring the progress of societies, there is not much existing research to draw on in considering the question: has the MDG framework had an impact? It is, of course, true that the framework as such has existed only for a few years, but it should be a matter of broad concern to know whether the MDGs appear to be having any significant impact on the real world, especially given that their first purpose, as noted above, is to act as an incentive for better outcomes for poor people.

40. In these circumstances, this Section will set out a number of hypotheses about the impact of the MDG framework, drawing on such research as exists and suggesting how these might be tested further. The question of whether any impacts were 'good' or 'bad' will be considered in Section 4.

41. The approach underlying these hypotheses is to assess:

    a) Whether the MDG paradigm has led to increased *attention* to those areas which it covers
    b) Whether increased attention has led to any observable changes in the *allocation of resources*[24] or the *policy framework*
    c) Whether increased allocation of resources or changes in the policy framework have led to any observable changes in *results.*[25]

42. It may be useful to state at the outset that it is bound to be difficult to specify the impact of the MDG framework with precision, since the ideas that lie behind each Goal have their own resonance. There is a long history, for example, of public concern for child survival, as with the founding of UNICEF in the late 1940s, and much direct investment in interventions designed to reduce infant and child mortality. We should be realistic about how far the effects of having a separate Goal for reducing infant and child mortality can be separated from

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[24] I fully recognize that progress is not just a matter of extra resources: effectiveness and institutional capacity are also key issues. But a shift in resources would say something important about the real priorities of the entity allocating these resources, whether a donor or a developing country government.

[25] I am indebted to Niels Dabelstein for this suggestion.

the effects of existing policies and frameworks for conceptualising the problem. The MDGs were clearly built on a long line of arguments for treating poverty as a multi-dimensional issue and on concerns that social indicators remained shockingly low.

43. *The first hypothesis is that impact on international discourse has been strong, and significantly stronger than for previous attempts to use indicator sets to highlight issues* (such as the 'Development Decades' or the various initiatives for Least Developed and Small Island countries). The MDGs represented something of a paradigm shift towards all parties working together to achieve mutually agreed goals within a specific time-frame. Relevant evidence that this paradigm shift has had traction at the level of international discourse includes:

- Strong follow-up within the international community, notably in the regular 'MDG Reports' issued by UN-DESA in association with the IMF, World Bank and OECD, the Global Monitoring Report of the IMF/World Bank, and the work of the UNDP (not least at country level). The MDGs have been monitored to an unprecedented degree, and greatly improved inter-agency collaboration on statistics has been achieved. In the latest MDG Report (2008), UN Under-Secretary Sha Zukang comments: 'The single most important success to date has been the unprecedented breadth and depth of the commitment to the MDGs – a global collective effort that is unsurpassed in 50 years of development experience.' This should not, however, obscure the great variability between countries and between sectors in the use made of the MDG framework.
- High-level events which draw on progress (or lack of it) towards the MDGs, including at the UN level the Monterrey Financing for Development Conference of March 2002, the General Assembly Summit session in September 2005, the high-level event of September 2008, and the Doha Financing for Development Conference of November/December 2008.
- The use of the MDGs in G8 Summit discourse, not least at the Gleneagles Summit in 2005, which was the focus for major new aid commitments to Africa (though delivery of these promises remained a major issue, even before the dimensions of the economic downturn became apparent).
- The use of MDG target data as central to agendas such as Education for All, promoting basic health or improving the coverage of water and sanitation. Education for All provides an interesting example where some concerns have been expressed that the focus on the MDG (basic education) may have diverted attention from other aspects of the agenda (e.g. pre-school

education and adult literacy). The UN-led Africa MDG Steering Group[26] was a good recent example of how MDG data can be used to highlight the need for progress.

- This has been supported by a strong communications strategy run centrally by the UNDP in the shape of the Millennium Campaign (outreach to civil society) and the Millennium Project (promotion of the MDGs through analytical work).[27] Google has nearly 2 million pages on the MDGs.

44. This hypothesis appears to be soundly based, and in line with the views of many experienced observers.[28] It would be interesting to compare the contribution of the MDG framework to international discourse with other attempts to influence international thinking about development which have not used time-bound targets, such as the 'basic needs' approaches of the 1970s or the ILO's more recent 'decent work' concept.

45. The hypothesis, if confirmed, is an important one. In an influential study by Carol Weiss[29] on the impact of social science research on policy, which is also relevant to assessing the impact of indicator sets, she argued that the most common way that social science research contributes to policy-making is through what she called an 'enlightenment' process. In this model, the generalisations that emerge from the diffusion of research findings (or, in the present instance, indicators) provide decision-makers with a way of framing the issues in a certain way. She argued that this makes policy-makers more sensitive to emerging challenges and plays a role in problem definition. There seems to be considerable evidence that, at least at the level of international discourse, the MDG framework has indeed provided an influential way of 'framing the issues'.

46. *The second hypothesis is that the MDG framework has been of significant value to advocates for pro-poor development around the world.*

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[26] UN-DESA (2008).

[27] See Sachs et al (2005).

[28] See, for example, Kevin Watkins' judgment that 'It would clearly be wrong, if not fanciful, to attribute advances in the war against poverty solely to the MDGs. By the same token, there is little question that the MDG targets have made a difference. The targets have provided a moral compass and a set of yardsticks for measuring progress. National governments, multilateral development banks, and bilateral donors have all scaled-up and strengthened the monitoring of progress towards the MDGs. More than that, they have placed poverty reduction at the centre of the international development agenda, helping to stimulate more rapid expansion of access to basic health, education and wider goals.' Watkins (2008).

[29] Weiss (1977).

47. The MDGs have a number of advantages from the point of view of advocates for progress in tackling poverty.

48. In the first place, they have a high degree of international legitimacy. In the second place, they are short, relatively jargon-free, and deal in concepts that the public can both understand and relate to – more children in school, fewer mothers dying in childbirth, the HIV/AIDS pandemic being tackled. At least in 2000, they appeared to be in general tough but not unrealistic targets (see Section 5 for the issue of how to handle the predictable failure of many countries to hit many of them). They also provided a broader framework for advocates concerned about global poverty than the succession of sectorally based summits that had preceded them.

49. This has led to the MDGs being used for advocacy internationally and in both rich and poorer countries. This is relevant to the finding of the OECD's work on the characteristics of successful indicator sets that *communication* is fundamental to their *impact*.[30]

50. Internationally, the Millennium Campaign has been an unusual, high-profile initiative, sustained already over nearly a decade. It has taken a global approach to its mandate, with significant visibility in poor countries, as well as in selected donor countries. Its trademark 'Stand up Against Poverty' day mobilised nearly 117 million people (over 70 million of them in Asia) in October 2008. The MDG framework has been central to the 'Make Poverty History' campaign and to the high-profile campaigns by ONE/DATA (e.g. the annual DATA reports highlight MDG progress and shortfalls).

51. More targeted campaigns have also drawn heavily on the MDGs, such as the White Ribbon Alliance for safe motherhood.

52. In donor countries, many groups make use of the MDGs as a campaign platform. This has translated into growing awareness, at least in some countries, of the MDG framework.

53. Work by the OECD Development Centre shows that, for seven out of eight European countries surveyed, there was a significant increase in awareness of the

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[30] Scrivens and Basiello, op. cit.

MDGs between 2004 and 2007 (the exception, Italy, had had one of the highest awareness levels in 2004, probably as a result of early targeting by the UN Millennium Campaign). The levels of awareness in Belgium, the Netherlands and Scandinavia are remarkably high for a policy area that does not affect their domestic economies in any major way.[31]

Table 1: Public Awareness of the MDGs in Europe

Source: OECD Development Centre[32]
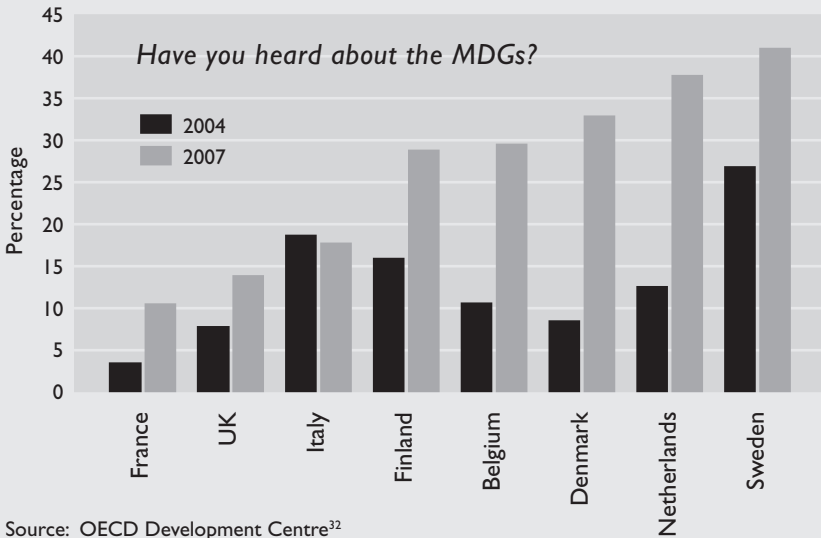
54. The OECD credits campaigns in Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden with some of the increased level of awareness in those four countries (no such campaigns took place in France or the UK, which are the countries in this sample with the lowest level of public awareness). The Development Centre study of these four campaigns concludes with messages of some interest to the present study:[33]

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[31] These figures, which come from Eurobarometer surveys, may, however, be over-optimistic. In Denmark, for example, domestic opinion polls show a figure of only 11% with any knowledge of the MDGs, and a considerably lower proportion that can name one of the Goals correctly (Kendskabsmåling, 2007, provided by Lars Engberg- Pedersen).

[32] http://www.oecd.org/document/31/0,3343,en_2649_34101_38405727_1_1_1_1,00html

[33] Mc Donnell (2008).

'MDGs are an effective basis from which awareness about the official aid agency/national development cooperation effort can be raised.

- Messages about fighting poverty reduction are well received by different audiences in the general public, they are also motivated by these messages.
- It is not always straightforward to communicate about all the goals in one message. Many of the campaigns stuck to the overall message about fighting poverty and zoomed-in on one of the goals and its relationship to fighting poverty.
- Audiences respond well to the 2015 dimension of the goals. As time evolves, or we get closer to 2015, MDG messages that refer to the deadline must be sensitive to how much time is left.'

55. A striking example of how civil society organisations can use the MDGs is provided by the Episcopal Church of the US.[34] Under the banner 'Episcopalians for Global Reconciliation', members are encouraged to contribute to international poverty reduction, using the Millennium Development Goals as a structure for this movement. The website[35] notes that the MDGs 'have been embraced by the Episcopal Church at the past three General Conventions, culminating in 2006 when the church made supporting the MDGs its No. 1 mission priority-- a recognition that living the Gospel requires an active global partnership to end extreme poverty.'

56. It is interesting to note the view of the Program on International Public Attitudes (PIPA), a US-based body which coordinates the 'World Public Opinion Survey'. They believe that what matters are not public perceptions of aid but *politicians' perceptions of public attitudes* of aid.[36] To the extent that the MDG framework has helped cement a view among politicians that aid which delivers good results for very poor people is something that the donor public will support, this could be very significant for the quality as well as the quantity of aid – witness the increasing CSO focus on 'real aid'. This does not belie the fact that, as noted below in Section 4, some (but by no means all) CSOs are highly critical of the MDGs as presenting a limiting view of the dynamics of pro-poor development – criticism that shows that the paradigm is thought to have had a measure of impact.

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[34] I am grateful to Sabina Alkire for bringing this example to my attention.

[35] see www.e4gr.org

[36] I am indebted to Henri-Bernard Solignac-Lecomte of the OECD Development Centre for this information.

57. Perhaps of greater interest is the evidence that the MDGs are being used by advocacy groups in the South. As noted above, the Millennium Campaign has had a good deal of traction in some of these countries, but there is also home-grown use of them. Thus in Bolivia, provinces have used maternal mortality data to argue their case for additional resources from Central Government.[37] In Albania, UNDP helped adapt the MDG indicators to the local context and then supported production of a report that tracked the status of targets and indicators for different areas within a province, leading to government-wide attention. In Vietnam, presentation of a report showing progress on MDG indicators at the sub-national level was influential with Parliamentarians.[38]

58. These examples are suggestive. It would, however, require a much fuller piece of research to make confident statements about the extent, let alone the effectiveness, of such advocacy.

59. It should also be borne in mind that, despite the stretch that many of them involve, the Goals are perceived by many civil society groups as under-ambitious, witness the reported view of one activist in Bangladesh,[39] who asked 'Who has the right to decide which people die in childbirth, stay in poverty etc?'

60. *The third hypothesis is that the impact of the MDG framework on government action in donor countries has been not insignificant but highly variable*, perhaps depending on how the framework matches domestic political priorities and discourse, and that more work is needed to assess any real effect on, for example, the allocation of aid. A starting point in assessing how far the MDG framework has influenced donor policies is to note that the variability of reference to it at government level is marked. In Japan, for example, the 'ODA Charter' of 2003, designed to give a ten-year perspective to Japan's aid, does not mention the MDGs at all, despite the fact that Japan was the first proponent of International Development Goals in the discussions that led to the DAC's *Shaping the 21st Century* publication of 1996, as set out in Annex 2. One commentator has explained this decision as follows:[40]

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[37] Information from George Gray Molina at an informal seminar in Oxford, November 2008.

[38] The Albanian and Vietnamese examples are summarised in UNDP (2004).

[39] As reported in a personal communication from DFID Bangladesh.

[40] Sunaga (2004).

It is interesting to note that the term 'MDGs' does not appear in the charter, but this fact does not lessen the importance that Japan attaches to the Millennium Development Goals. The charter is a policy statement with a ten year framework. No one can predict what the status of the MDGs will be in ten years. Although each element of the MDGs has a universal value which is unlikely to evaporate in a decade, a new strategy or policy framework might emerge to replace or reconceptualise the MDGs in the future. For this reason, the charter has deliberately avoided that term, while articulating major elements that encompass the MDGs.

61. Similarly, the Bush Administration's foreign assistance budget request to Congress of January 2008 did not include 'MDGs' in its four pages of acronyms, despite copious references to, for example, poverty and child survival. It would seem that the MDG framework as such has had little impact on at least official thinking in these two major donors, perhaps in part because appealing to a multilaterally agreed framework may not have seemed very attractive in domestic political terms. However, President Obama has specifically committed his Administration to support of the Goals, which indicates also the profile that they have managed to acquire even in a country where the government has had significant problems with them.[41] In her confirmation hearing in January 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton identified 'working aggressively to reach the Millennium Development Goals in health, education, and economic opportunity' as one of the Administration's priorities (though it is notable that this remark was made in relation to Africa specifically).

62. Unlike Japan and the Bush Administration, most (but not all) other DAC Governments appear to have found the MDGs a good way of engaging with their legislatures and public opinions. A particularly prominent place has been accorded to the MDG framework by the EU, for example, in its 2005 Development Policy Statement. Indeed, the MDG concept seems to have been significantly more influential in Europe than among non-European donors. This is important, as Europe is the largest single source of official development assistance, though even within Europe, there is significant variation in the extent to which the MDG framework is central to public discourse about aid.

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[41] 'The United Nations has embraced the Millennium Development Goals, which aim to cut extreme poverty in half by 2015. When I'm President, they will be America's goals.'—Barack Obama, Chicago, 2 October 2007.

63. In a recent study for the International Poverty Centre,[42] Sakiko Fukuda-Parr examined the policy statements of 21 bilateral donor members of the OECD DAC. The analysis showed that, according to these statements, tackling multi-dimensional poverty—including income poverty, education and health—was the central policy objective of almost all of them. But some objectives, such as addressing maternal mortality and child survival, received surprisingly limited emphasis in donor priorities. There were also some contrasts with recipient priorities: the environment and governance were top priorities for more than three-quarters of donors. In contrast to the PRSPs (see paras 74-77 below), the environment and sustainable development priorities did not focus mainly on water and sanitation, but on environmental protection and conservation; the more recent statements mentioned climate change. Governance was not concerned just with the rule of law but also gave a priority to promoting human rights and democracy.

64. More than three-quarters of bilateral donors gave a priority to promoting peace and security, an objective that is not included among the MDGs, though it is, of course, a central goal of the Millennium Declaration.

65. MDG priorities that were underemphasised, but for which there were significant action plans, included employment, hunger, maternal mortality, child survival, gender equality, social integration, and science and technology. The two principles of equality and partnership, including global solidarity, were included in about half of the donor policy statements. There was strong emphasis on growth as the main means of reducing poverty. Not much attention was paid to the impact of economic policy choices on the distribution of benefits, job creation and other pro-poor concerns.

66. Policy statements are only useful up to a point. A second stage would be to trace whether there has been any significant increase in donor allocations in support of outputs and outcomes highlighted in the MDG framework, including both inter-country and inter-sectoral aid allocation.

67. Regarding the first, there has been an observable shift towards sub-Saharan Africa and the Least Developed Countries at the expense notably of the larger

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[42] Fukuda-Parr (2008).

Middle Income countries, once distortions arising from the Iraq war and debt relief are discounted.[43] It could be argued that, on a narrow view of maximum delivery against the MDGs by 2015, a greater proportion of aid should go to large poor Asian countries, but the shift to Africa may reflect a reasoned view that the long-term problems of meeting the MDGs in Africa are more challenging.[44] This would certainly be consistent with the messages coming from the monitoring of the MDGs. On this basis, however, there is still a need to consider how to deal adequately with the problems of fragile states, where the distance from the MDGs is particularly pronounced.

68. On the second, it is certainly the case that the proportion of ODA going to the social sectors that loom large in the MDGs has risen over the past decade or more (see Section 4 below). Basic social-sector spending has also been protected within national budgets in most Poverty Reduction Strategies, by contrast to their treatment under earlier models of Structural Adjustment. It is certainly possible also that the existence of the MDGs has encouraged sector-based approaches, particularly for health and education, as ways of helping to achieve sector goals (including those that are harder to address such as maternal mortality). However, as noted below, it may be difficult to distinguish the impact of the MDG framework from other factors affecting sector allocation. A striking example is the huge rise in US funding for HIV/AIDS, which seems to have been driven by very much the same factors as led to the establishment of specific targets for tackling the pandemic, but without explicit reference to the MDG framework itself. In Europe, there would be stronger grounds for associating increases in aid to the social sectors with the MDG framework, though there were other encouragements, including the '20:20' concept developed at the World Social Summit, which set a (voluntary) standard of at least 20% of host government spending and of official development assistance to be allocated to the social sectors. It is certainly possible that there has been a degree of 'mutual reinforcement' between these various initiatives to reinforce the importance of investment in areas such as health and education.[45]

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[43] See OECD (2007), pp. 19-20.

[44] See Adrian Wood (2008).

[45] Variability among donors is, however, still very marked. As much as 60% of all aid for basic education is provided by two bilateral donors (Netherlands and UK) and by IDA, showing that many major donors are making very modest contributions to this particular MDG (World Bank, Global Monitoring Report, 2009).

69. A similar argument might be made at sub-sectoral level, with the emergence of strongly focussed global funding initiatives for specific health measures such as vaccination or for basic education. The particular focus of the MDGs may have strengthened the hand of those policy communities that have been pressing for more action on, for example, major infectious diseases[46] and thus making the case for new 'vertical' funds, with some consequences, now increasingly recognised, for the funding for health systems. From this point of view, the MDG framework, like other aspects of 'New Public Management', may have encouraged a focus on readily measurable outcomes, possibly at the expense of areas that are harder to measure, such as the competence of public institutions (which are arguably at least as important for sustainable development). It may well have contributed also to middle-level officials in aid agencies taking a narrow view of priorities, both between and within sectors, on the basis that activities with obvious and direct links to the MDGs are to be preferred to others which may, nevertheless, be fundamental to sustained pro-poor development. This has clearly resonated with the increasing pressure for managing for results, both within aid agencies and within governments in the North and South.

70. Of course, to suggest that only sector-specific forms of aid should be counted in any calculus would be a very narrow view. In this context, one interesting innovation is to provide budget support with a clear link to MDG outcomes. This is exactly the approach taken by the European Commission in its 'MDG Contracts', where a proportion of general budget support is conditioned on the rate of progress towards the MDGs.

71. A further unremarked impact seems possible in relation to aid volume, with the adoption by the European Union in 2005 of a Decision that would, if implemented, mean that all the EU-15 (i.e. the EU before enlargement to central, eastern and south-eastern Europe) would achieve the ODA/GNI target of 0.7% by 2015, a target at present achieved by only four of their number. The choice of 2015 for this commitment seems to have been driven by the use of this as a target date for the MDGs, even though it might be thought that delivering aid increases in the final year of outcome-based targets is behind the curve.

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[46] 'By highlighting communicable, maternal, peri-natal, and nutritional conditions, MDGs 4 to 6 may divert attention from the already more important and more rapidly growing Non-Communicable Diseases'; J.R.Behrman in Cockburn and Valdivia (2008). Paul Isenman has similarly highlighted to me his concern that MDG literalism has diverted donor attention from helping to tackle the health consequences of tobacco use in developing countries.

72. The MDG framework has also had some impact on international institutions. Thus within the UN system, work towards incorporating the MDGs into country contexts has also served as a force around which to rally the complementary development activities of UN Country Teams. Indeed, it is not only a coincidence that some of the leading 'One-UN' pilot countries also offer some of the most advanced examples of applying the MDG framework, including Albania and Vietnam. At the same time, individual targets and indicators tend to be 'owned' by one agency or another, thus perpetuating arguments about 'turf' and priority-setting. And the International Financial Institutions have also given the MDG paradigm visibility in their own work. As an example, all reports to the IMF Executive Board on countries eligible for the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility contain a tracking table on the MDG goals and targets. The impact of the MDG framework on their policies and resource allocation would require a much more detailed assessment.

73. *The fourth hypothesis is that the impact of the MDG framework on government action in developing countries has been modest, but generally more significant in countries that are heavily dependent on aid.*

74. This is the most significant of the core hypotheses but the least amenable to simple testing. It rests on the view that, for most middle-income countries, the MDGs may be seen as not particularly ambitious or relevant, and that such countries are likely to continue and develop existing policies, which are largely financed by domestic revenue and not greatly affected by international discourse. On the other hand, for the poorer countries (which in general are also the more aid-dependent), the MDG framework is seen as much more relevant in itself, and is also likely to be used to a significant extent in discussions with a usually influential donor community. There is also evidence that it is also used in internal discourse and in decision-making in at least some cases.[47]

75. A crucial question is whether countries perceive the MDGs as essentially an internationally imposed framework of doubtful relevance to their development strategies, or as a way of accounting for and incentivising progress for which they feel ownership. The adaptation of the MDGs to local priorities and timelines, as for example in Cambodia, is usually a signal that there is at least some real local

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[47] A specific example, brought to my attention at an informal seminar in Oxford to discuss an early draft of this paper, relates to the difficulty of a Trade Ministry in an African country obtaining Finance Ministry approval for a particular investment that was designed to enhance exports on the grounds that it did not advance the MDGs.

ownership. The use of such a framework as an element in a more participatory and evidence-based approach to development would be a particularly valuable product. More work would be needed to make confident statements about the extent to which such an approach is used in practice.

76. Meanwhile, a very interesting analysis of Poverty Reduction Strategies has recently been carried out by Sakiko Fukuda-Parr.[48] She examined 22 PRSPs, covering 17 Least Developed Countries, 2 other Low Income Countries (Ghana and Vietnam) and 3 Middle Income Countries (Bolivia, Bosnia and Nicaragua). She found that almost all the PRSPs stated a commitment to the MDGs, but that in most countries the focus was quite selective, with economic growth and social-sector spending being given a good deal of attention, while such aspects as decent work, hunger and nutrition, environment and technology transfer were often ignored. The governance agenda focused on the rule of law and eliminating corruption, not on democracy, freedom of the media or human rights. Gender empowerment and partnership were sometimes mentioned rhetorically, but often without explicit action plans. Similarly, little attention was paid to equity as an issue.

77. The analysis showed that quantitative targets were set for some but not all MDG priorities. More than three-quarters of the PRSPs set targets for income poverty, primary schooling, gender equality in primary school, maternal mortality, and water and sanitation; but they did not set targets for hunger, employment, child survival, the environment, governance, social integration, science and technology, or partnership. Interestingly, where targets were set, most exceeded the MDGs in ambition, as well as historical trends. There must be doubts as to the realism of some of these targets.

78. There were differences in how the PRSPs used the MDG targets in policy-making. One country, Cambodia, systematically adapted the numerical targets and developed 'Cambodia MDGs'. Others used MDG targets in combination with other strategic frameworks such as 'Vision 2025' in Tanzania and 'Vision 2020' in Rwanda. These would both reflect the view that the MDGs should be 'adapted not adopted' at country level.[49] Others, however, appear to have adopted the MDG targets without adapting them.

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[48] Fukuda-Parr (2008).
[49] See Vandemoortele (2007). Indeed, many countries have tailored the global MDGs to their national context. See, for example, UNDG (2005).

79. In many of the countries reviewed, governments with UN Millennium Project support had estimated the investment needed to meet the MDGs that depend on public spending on social services such as education, health, and water and sanitation. However, none of the PRSPs referred to these cost estimates. They were not fully incorporated into the countries' planning and budgeting, either because resources could not be mobilised, or because of concerns about the reliability of the estimates themselves and their potential macroeconomic impact on public expenditure ceilings and aid dependence.

80. While this analysis is very useful, there is the possibility of significant donor 'contamination' of documents such as PRSPs (i.e. if the MDGs are seen as important to at least European donors and key multilaterals which depend heavily on European contributions, references in local documents may amount to little more than political correctness).

81. There is also the question of how far PRSPs translate into medium-term expenditure frameworks and the annual budget process. Much experience, reflected in the monitoring of the Paris Declaration, shows that such links cannot be taken for granted. There are many countries where longstanding multi-year strategies (five year plans etc.) are the main basis for taking policy and resourcing decisions, and the extent to which these incorporate MDG-related outcomes would need separate study.

82. It would be desirable, therefore, also to assess how far the allocation of domestic resources may have shifted towards spending in support of specific MDGs. At a broad level, there is some evidence that social-sector spending has been increasing as a proportion of total government expenditure in poor countries, as might be expected from a more MDG-based approach to development. For example, the IMF's Regional Economic Outlook for Sub-Saharan Africa of October 2007 reported that central government social-sector spending in low-income countries in the region had increased very consistently between 2000 and 2007 from just under 4% of GDP to approaching 6%.[50] However, it would take a much more careful analysis than is possible in this document to assess in detail the composition of this expenditure. Also, the writing off of debts under the HIPC initiative and the first generation of Poverty Reduction Strategies was associated with an increased propensity to favour social-sector spending independently of the MDGs

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[50] IMF (2007), Figure 1.21.

(though perhaps influenced by their DAC predecessor). Some more in-depth discussion with key opinion-formers and decision-makers in a representative sample of countries would be necessary to make confident statements about the impact at country level. For Middle Income Countries, which are less dependent on donors, government policy documents may be less affected by donors' preferences, but some in-depth work would still be necessary to assess whether the MDG framework and its sharp focus on observable outcomes had or had not proved influential in decision-taking.

83. *The fifth hypothesis is that the MDG framework has had a significant effect in encouraging the collection and use of data, but that this needs to be complemented more effectively with policy-relevant analysis.*

84. The hypothesis that the MDG framework has significantly encouraged the collection and use of data seems well-founded. Good international examples, beyond those already referred to, include the annual EFA Monitoring Report, and the strengthening and rationalisation of surveys of health status. The Partnership for Information and Statistics for the Twenty-First Century (PARIS21), which aims to help developing countries build their capacity to produce policy-relevant statistics, was established in response to a UN ECOSOC resolution about the need to help developing countries build the capacity necessary to monitor the MDGs. Initiatives such as the Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics (2004) have been facilitated by the demand for better data on information required by the UN and others for the monitoring of the MDGs. UNICEF's 'DEVINFO' software is widely used to disseminate information on the MDGs locally, an activity highly relevant to better communication.

85. Two concerns should, however, be highlighted.

86. First, the challenge of building effective in-country capacity to present policy-relevant data to opinion-formers and decision-makers remains huge. Far too much of the growing amount of data cited in high-level reports is still based on poor quality information, extrapolation and guesswork. It is not clear that the expanding number of surveys and data collection exercises has had a positive and sustainable impact on local capacity. It is quite possible that we are in fact seeing a growing mismatch between the multiple demands for monitoring and the ability of local systems to generate credible data. There is a danger that an 'MDG Results Industry' could consume a lot of resources to rather little effect.

87. This links to the second concern,[51] that insufficient effort may be made currently to analyse the reasons for poor performance against the sort of development outcomes covered by the MDG framework. This would weaken the feedback loop from data collection to decisions on the allocation of resources and policy choices. The World Bank's 'Maquette for MDG Simulations' (MAMS) is an interesting example of a tool to assess the implications for fiscal and other policies of a serious pursuit of MDG outcomes.[52] Tools of this kind could become significant in helping build better links between the observed facts and the choices open to policy-makers.

88. It is clear in any case that an unprecedented attempt has been made, particularly since 2000, in collecting and bringing together data on what is happening on the ground in all aspects of development. The MDG framework has been one very significant stimulus for this. According to PARIS21, the percentage of countries with at least two data points for a short list of MDG indicators, excluding data modelled by agencies, rose from 56% to 71% between 2006 and 2008.[53] This is a basic building block for evidence-based policy.

A sixth and final hypothesis is that impact on the ground cannot be attributed solely to the MDG framework, but that it may well have played a role in amplifying attention to some key areas.

89. Turning finally to real-world impact, the latest UN MDG Report highlights 11 cases where very substantial progress has been made and a similar number where the gap is striking. (Some of these represent 'half-full' and 'half-empty' ways of looking at the same issue, for example, 'the gender parity index in primary education is 95% or higher in six of the ten regions, including the most populous ones'; but 'of the 113 countries that failed to achieve gender parity in both primary and secondary school enrolment by the target date of 2005, only 18 are likely to achieve the goal by 2015'.) It rightly notes that some of the achievements have been through targeted interventions, while others depend on 'country-wide systems...and an effective institutional infrastructure', which require 'strong political commitment and adequate funding over a longer period

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[51] Articulated notably by Bourguignon et al (2008).

[52] For example, in Ghana preliminary results from the MAMS showed that, although the country might expect to deliver on some MDGs, it would fall short on others unless there were to be a major scaling up of external resources (IMF (2007), p. 28).

[53] See section 4 of http://www.paris21.org/documents/3325.pdf

before the effects become visible'. This analysis should warn us against simplistic attempts to draw conclusions about the impact of the MDG framework on results on the ground. But this does not mean that nothing can be said.

90. As a possible example of impact, the evolution of policy and resource allocation for primary education is worth brief consideration.

91. The facts on the ground suggest only a modest increase during the 1990s in the proportion of the primary school-age cohort attending school in developing countries, despite the suggestion in the conclusions to the Jomtien Conference of 1990 that countries should plan to achieve universal access to, and completion of, primary education by 2000. They also suggest a significant increase in the rate of growth of this proportion from about 2002 on (Table 2, below).

Table 2: ODA to Basic Education (constant 2006 USD billion) and percent of primary school age children enrolled in school, 1994-2007, 3-year moving averages

Basic education*, left hand scale
Primary school enrollment**, right hand scale
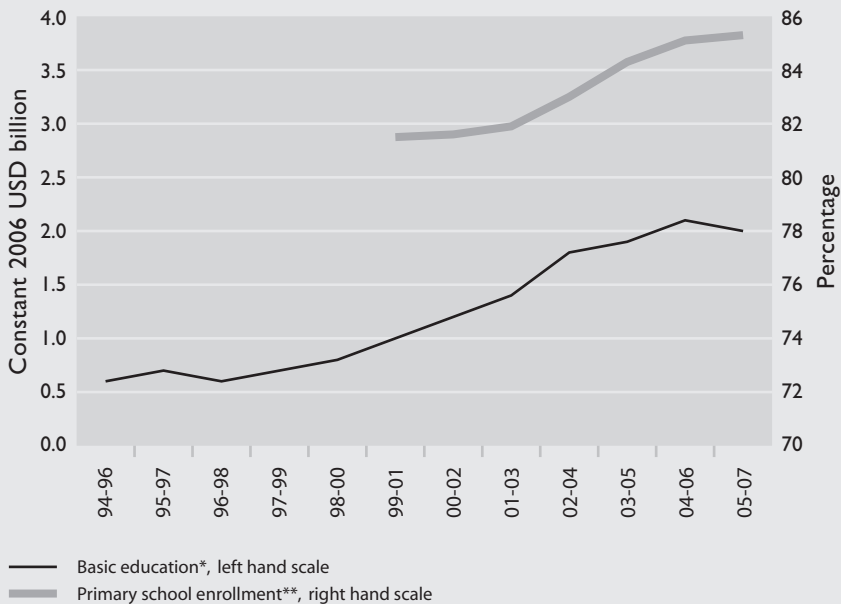
 *: Source: DAC5. Data collection on Basic Education began with 1993 data.
**: Source: WDI. No data available between 1994-1998 and since 2006

This follows a steady scaling up of aid to basic education from about 1999, which, while predating the MDGs, may reflect the fact that several members of the donor community had been increasingly highlighting the goal of universal primary education - at least since the DAC publication of 1996, 'Shaping the 21st Century' (see Annex 2), had given prominence to this and other goals.[54]

92. Three factors seem to have come together:

- At country level, the HIPC process both freed up resources and gave prominence to so-called poverty spending, including basic education (some key countries outside the HIPC group, such as India, also increased the priority they gave to Universal Primary Education, often with donor support)
- At a policy level, the International Financial Institutions moved to a policy that no longer sought cost-recovery at primary level, thus enabling HIPC countries in particular to eliminate school fees (an attractive move in domestic political terms)
- Donors increased aid allocations to basic education.[55]

93. Clearly, it would be absurd to conclude that the upturn in primary enrolment was wholly due to the MDG framework or its OECD-DAC predecessor. (Indeed it seems intrinsically unlikely that any real-world change would be *solely* due to the existence of a set of international goals.) But the highlighting of universal primary education as a feasible and necessary policy through the OECD-DAC International Development Goals and then the MDGs seems a common thread in each of these three factors. This capacity to 'amplify' attention to specific development issues may be a key significance of the MDG framework.[56] Clearly, more work would be needed to assess the plausibility of this assertion in particular cases.

[54] Of course, no simple 1:1 linkage between increased aid and increased enrolment is shown by the graphic, nor should this be expected.

[55] But see also footnote 45 above.

[56] I have here concentrated merely on the question of access. Serious concerns, of course, remain over the quality of the learning experience. The issue is considered further in Section 4.

Section 4: What can we learn from the design of the MDG FRAMEWORK?

94. In this Section, five main aspects of the MDG framework are considered:

- Has its structure proved appropriate?
- Has the choice of area for the Goals proved appropriate?
- Has the choice of parameters (the targets and indicators) proved appropriate?
- Has the choice of period proved appropriate?
- Has the rate of progress demanded by the time-bound targets proved appropriate?

In addition, the Section looks at the potential tension, referred to in Section 1, para. 14, between the global, regional, national and sub-national use of the MDG framework.

95. The word 'appropriate' necessarily raises the question 'appropriate for what?' Based on the discussion in Section 1, paragraphs 10-11, the purpose of the MDG framework is taken as being *to encourage sustainable pro-poor development progress and donor support of domestic efforts in this direction.*[57] The appropriateness of the various factors mentioned is therefore assessed from this standpoint.

a) Structure

96. The structure of the MDG framework, as set out in Annex 1, is based on 8 Goals, most expressed in very general terms,[58] 21 targets to be reached by a set date (usually 2015), and a further 60 indicators without specific targets, but which help assess whether the targets have been met.

97. The structure has the important merit, for purposes of public understanding, of being focused on a manageable number of issues. The structure of just 8 Goals, 21 targets but 60 indicators may be considered an elegant way to retain

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[57] It is worth observing that there could be a tension between the two linked purposes which I have identified for the MDG framework: the messages that may be most effective in garnering donor support for pro-development policies and sustained aid programmes may be different from those most likely to incentivise sustainable progress on the ground. I owe this point to Dr Claire Melamed (Action Aid).

[58] Goal 2: 'Achieve Universal Primary Education' stands out as much more 'target-like' than the other Goals.

this focus without over-simplifying the development process to the point of absurdity.

98. On the other hand, the very general nature of some of the goals (for example, on poverty reduction, gender or the environment) makes it hard to come up with targets and indicators that adequately capture the key elements of the policy area in question.

99. This kind of mismatch is not unfamiliar in such constructions. For example, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness has 12 targets, mostly in this case measured by one or two indicators. Reasonable concerns have been expressed about how far some of the Paris indicators shed useful light on individual targets.

100. As an MDG example, access to water and sanitation is surely a parameter to be tracked in any set of development indicators, but it may not be best located as an indicator of 'ensuring environmental sustainability'. It is worth recalling that the drinking water target was linked to the income poverty and hunger targets in the Millennium Declaration: equally, progress in this area is closely linked to infant and child mortality, thus showing the inter-related nature of the framework. There should be greater emphasis on the synergies between the various goals.

101. A second inherent weakness of the structure of the MDG framework is that it tends to separate the areas covered in an artificial way. For example, it is not just investment in health services that improves health status. Ease of travel is probably an essential element for reducing maternal mortality; clean water is a key issue for child mortality and morbidity; and increased income is positively correlated with improved health status for poor people. The MDG framework is, from this point of view, too 'tidy' to reflect the complex realities of the world in which the poor actually live, and it lacks a more overarching perspective on what sustainable, pro-poor development means. Nevertheless, it is arguably a good deal better than a narrow focus on GDP per head from this perspective.

102. An overall conclusion might be that the structure of the MDGs is appropriate from the point of view of improving public understanding (perhaps particularly, but certainly not exclusively, in donor countries) of what sustainable pro-poor development might look like in practice, and thus incentivising progress; but that it is less useful if perceived as a tool for deciding what investments should be given a priority in order to achieve such development.

103. This would be in line with the analysis by Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, whose recent study was cited in the previous Section. She draws a distinction between the use of global goals, such as the MDGs as:

- *normative objectives* that define long-term visions. She argues that such normative goals are particularly useful for political leaders in forging a consensus on a common aim of the efforts of many in their community, be it a village or the world.
- *evaluative benchmarks* against which progress can be measured.[59]
- *planning targets* to frame priorities for policy and for resource allocation.

    She argues that the MDG paradigm is well-adapted to normative and evaluative uses, but that using them as planning targets gives rise to several contradictions, some of which are explored below.

104. A slightly different, but related, approach[60] would be to think of the MDG framework as a means of encouraging decision-makers to take steps to increase and pursue effective action and to discontinue ineffective action over a fairly lengthy development cycle. Seen from this perspective also, it may be less important to achieve actual target numbers than it is to have an organizing framework around which to take consistent action over the medium term in a very complex field.

b) Areas

105. The areas covered by the Goals all appear to be significant. But the selection of areas for the Goals ("*what* to measure?") has come under attack from two different directions[61] for leaving important issues out of account.

106. In the first place, many advocates have criticised the absence of a Goal or of targets that stress *rights, empowerment* and *good governance*. This arguably gives the MDGs a 'service delivery' flavour which may overlook some of the real-world factors that 'keep the poor in their place'. Indeed, many civil society

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[59] Bourguignon et al. (2008) also see potential in this direction. They argue that 'The MDGs, at least those that are clearly about outcomes...come into their own in performance assessment. The level of infant mortality can be used to measure need, but the rate of improvement in child mortality could be a measure of performance.'

[60] Suggested to me by Bruce Purdue (Asian Development Bank).

[61] Much of the literature suggests that proponents of the two main critiques listed below are usually focused on one or the other. For a combined critique, see Maxwell (2003).

organisations believe that the MDGs represent a reduction of the agreements signed by governments and for which these organisations strongly lobbied at the series of UN Conferences during the 1990s. The absence of agreed indicators in these areas has also been a factor here, one that has attracted interesting new academic work. Some would also argue that the MDG paradigm 'ghettoises' the development problem rather than building structural linkages with, for example, Northern lifestyles.[62]

107. The Millennium Declaration and the Secretary-General's 'road map' *did* contain a number of goals in relation to these areas (e.g., in the 'road-map', a goal 'to strengthen the capacity of all our countries to implement the principles and practices of democracy and human rights, including minority rights'). There were, however, no time-bound targets associated with them, and the Annex on the Millennium Development Goals therefore did not address them.[63] Setting international targets in this political arena is always likely to be controversial, but several approaches would appear possible. One way would be (in line with the Goals in the Secretary-General's 'Road Map' of 2001) to base the approach on agreed international human rights standards. Another, taken in a series of papers from the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), is to round out the dimensions of poverty in the UN Human Development Index by adding further dimensions.[64] OPHI propose employment (with a focus on quality), empowerment, physical security, the ability to go about without shame, and psychological and subjective well-being, for all of which they are proposing specific indicators. (Of these, employment is already at least partly captured in the current MDG set.) In similar fashion, the University of Bath is proposing a definition of 'well-being' that would capture more dimensions of poverty, inequality and quality of life.[65] A challenge for all these approaches is how to capture more dimensions of poverty in a limited number of indicators.

108. A similar gap is observable in relation to such issues as the quality of institutions and human security, both of which can be 'binding constraints' on development,

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[62] See Saith (2006).

[63] It appears that two major criteria for inclusion in MDGs were used by those drafting the Annex: (i) whether internationally agreed indicators existed for measuring progress; and (ii) whether reasonably good data were available to document global trends (Jan Vandemoortele, personal communication).

[64] See Alkire (2007).

[65] See www.welldev.org.uk

not least in fragile states. Here again, however, the difficulties of target-setting are formidable.

109. The concerns about the absence of measures of rights and empowerment are linked to concerns that the MDG framework does not directly address the issue of *relative poverty* (with the important exception of an indicator of the 'share of the poorest quintile in national consumption'). Notably, the income poverty goal addresses an absolute measure of extreme poverty, and progress in reducing absolute poverty might have no effects on relative poverty, nor on the overall inequalities within society. While universal primary education and gender equality in primary and secondary education would represent important steps towards greater equality of opportunity, in principle the health goals could also be reached without any improvement in the health of the poorest in society. Indeed, the nature of many of the targets is that the least costly way of achieving progress is to tackle the problems of those groups that fall just short of the target in question.

110. Inequalities in society raise major political issues and are often at the heart of domestic political debates. This makes them harder to address in internationally agreed texts than issues of absolute poverty. However, it is perfectly possible to set objectives that address inequality in either opportunities (as is already the case for the education and gender goals) or outcomes (as shown by the consumption share indicator mentioned above, which is admittedly not a target). An interesting example of a target for closing an inequality of social outcome is a UK Government health target aimed at reducing inequalities in health outcomes. The infant mortality element of the target is:

- Starting with children under one year old, by 2010 to reduce by at least 10% the gap in mortality between the 'routine and manual group'[66] and the population as a whole.

111. Some advocates argue that the MDG paradigm should have had a much sharper focus on relative poverty and inequalities. Kevin Watkins (2008), for example, reports a survey that suggests that in 13 of 22 countries surveyed, the rate of improvement in child mortality for the lowest quintile of

[66] In practice, this quaintly named group is representative of the relatively poor in UK society. For details, see Review of the Health Inequalities Infant Mortality PSA Target, Department of Health (2007).

the population has been below the average rate of improvement in the same countries since 1990, and argues for putting equity goals at the heart of a revised MDG agenda.

112. This issue is likely to require a good deal of discussion. One conceptually simple starting point would be to collect disaggregated data on the MDGs not just by sex and urban/rural residence (as is supposed to happen now; see Annex 1), but to do the same routinely by income quintile. Some work of this kind is already being done, as the survey quoted by Watkins demonstrates. The main problem is less likely to be a political one than one of the availability of the necessary basic data, which would normally require separate surveys. This kind of work could be particularly useful at country level, and there would appear to be a good case for a co-ordinated effort to promote it, making maximum use of existing opportunities.

113. These critiques of the MDG paradigm are significant. However, their proponents need to show practical ways of measuring the dimensions which they propose that would not seriously overburden the MDG paradigm (given that its relative parsimony at the Goal level seems to be a key to its influence).

114. The second main strand of criticism has been that, by having several goals for the social sectors but no explicit goal for *growth* (a contrast to the UN Development Decade precedents), the growth dimension of poverty reduction has been underplayed in favour of a model that, whatever its intentions, has a 'welfarist' cast.[67] It is, of course, true that Goal 1 could be taken as covering all the factors that go into the reduction of income poverty, of which growth is surely one,[68] but this is hardly evident in the associated targets and indicators (except for the employment target).[69] Some have argued that this has encouraged a fundamentally non-sustainable approach, which will, in the absence of growth, lead to a short-term improvement in

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[67] For a robust statement of this view, see Chang, Ha-Joon (2008), and for a counter-view, Ramirez et al. (1997).

[68] Bourguignon et al. (2008) conclude that, 'On average a 1% growth in mean income generates a 1% drop in the poverty headcount. However, this effect appears to be lower in quite a few countries, including China, Honduras, Ghana, Uganda and Cambodia. The relatively low effect of growth in the mean income of the population on poverty reduction is closely related to rising income inequality in most developing countries since the early 1990s.' They also find that there is limited linkage between reduction in income poverty and most non-income MDGs, and that the correlation between GDP per capita growth and non-income MDGs is practically zero. They thus conclude that growth is necessary but not sufficient for a sustainable MDG strategy.

[69] Growth issues are, however, explicitly discussed in, for example, the annual Bank-Fund Global Monitoring Report, on the premise that growth is a prerequisite for progress in poverty reduction and other MDGs.

some social indicators but ultimately, as in Tanzania in the 1970s, prove ephemeral.[70]

115. The MDG framework (and its OECD-DAC predecessor) has been linked in particular to the shift of aid from the productive sectors and infrastructure in favour of the social sectors that did indeed take place between 1990 and 2005 (see Table 3 below). It has also been associated with the strong focus in the first-generation PRSPs on the social sectors, allegedly pushed for by most of the international donor community, despite the wish of poor countries to give greater relative priority to stimulating growth and reducing their dependence on aid. Evidence that many poor countries do feel this includes the greater emphasis on growth in second-generation (and more country-owned) PRSPs, the similar emphasis in the aid-for-trade discussions, and the fact that emerging donors such as China and new agencies such as the US Millennium Challenge Corporation receive many requests for growth-promoting infrastructure projects, and few for the social sectors.

116. However, it would almost certainly be a mistake to assign the sole (or possibly even the main) responsibility for this shift to the MDG paradigm. In the first place, the shift seems to have begun even before the OECD-DAC discussion that led to *Shaping the 21st Century*, let alone the Millennium Assembly. In the second place, the acceptance by bilateral donors of the so-called 'Helsinki Agreement' of 1991, which imposed new disciplines on tied aid credits, radically changed donor incentives since projects rated as potentially commercially viable could no longer be financed by tied aid. This applied in particular to most interventions for the industrial sector, for which ODA fell very quickly after the Helsinki Agreement, to telecommunications, large power stations and some transport projects, though it is unlikely to have been a factor in less obviously commercial areas such as rural power projects, roads other than toll roads, water supply and sanitation, and agriculture. In the third place, there was an increase in private-sector investment in some forms of infrastructure, notably telecommunications and some parts of the power sector, which arguably reduced the need for donor finance in these areas.

117. In the fourth place, many DAC members seem to have decided that there was likely to be more domestic public support for aid that was aimed at making a

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[70] Dercon (2008). See also Crosswell (2005) for a broader critique of 'poverty-reduction' approaches in practice.

Table 3:

Share of Transport, Energy, Agriculture* and Industry** sectors in total sector allocable bilateral ODA, 1990-2007, 3-year moving averages

*: Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing.   **: Industry, Mining and Construction

Share of Basic Education, Basic Health and Water Supply & Sanitation* in total sector allocable bilateral ODA, 1990-2007, 3-year moving averages
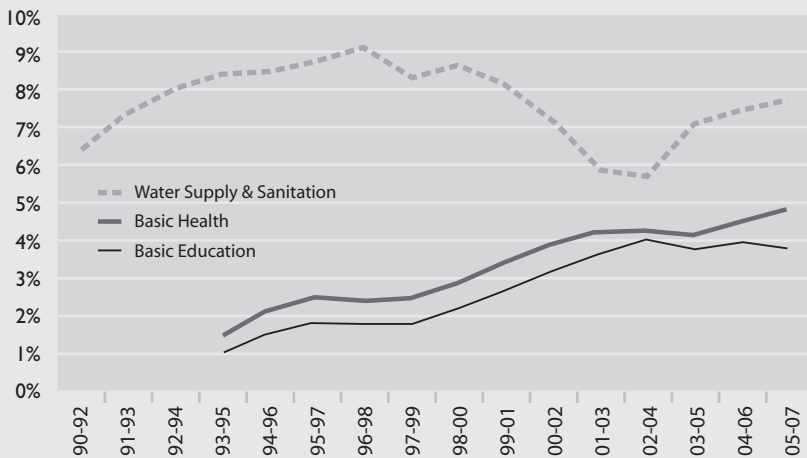
*: Data collection on Basic Education and Basic Health began with 1993 data.

visible difference to poor people's lives. This was certainly the direction of much civil society pressure in the context of reducing debt, witness the categorisation by the IMF and World Bank of various types of spending (notably but not exclusively social-sector spending) as 'pro-poor'. Finally, we should recognise the possibility that the MDG framework has incentivised increases in the volume of aid (e.g. the EU pledges of 2005 and those for Africa at Gleneagles the same year), which would need to be weighed against the possible distorting effects.

118. Despite these points, a tentative conclusion could be that – to the extent that it has influence either with donor agencies or in local decision-making – there is at least a possibility that the MDG framework may encourage aid-dependent countries in particular along a path which prolongs this dependence (as social-sector recurrent costs rise) beyond what would be achieved by an alternative strategy giving greater importance to growth and self-reliance (possibly, however, at some cost to outcomes in health and education).

119. If this is thought to be a problem – and it is clearly a matter for each country to consider, through its own institutional arrangements, its own priorities for the balance it wishes to strike in its development path – the answer is probably not to re-introduce targets for growth, which were a particularly ineffective feature of Development Decade targets and were eschewed by DAC in its design of the International Development Goals in 1995/96. Instead, use should be made of indicators for access to infrastructure services beyond water and IT (both covered already) and the scope be measured for efficient private-sector operations (for which indicators such as the World Bank's 'Doing Business' indicator exist). An alternative would be to add a 'sustainability indicator', such as ODA as a proportion of the budget or tax revenue generated by the private sector, though this would be different in type from outcome goals.[71]

120. Concerns about empowerment and inequality on the one hand and growth on the other may sound like an all-too-familiar reprise of past controversies over the respective merits of alternative politico-economic models. It is therefore interesting that the Growth Commission, while lamenting the lack of good measurements of infrastructural investment, concludes that 'Growth strategies cannot succeed without a commitment to equality of opportunity, giving everyone a fair chance to enjoy the fruits of growth. But equal opportunities

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[71] I owe this suggestion to Louis Kasekende.

are no guarantee of equal outcomes. Indeed, in the early stages of growth, there is a natural tendency for income gaps to widen. Governments should seek to contain this inequality, the Commission believes, at the bottom and top ends of the income spectrum. Otherwise, the economy's progress may be jeopardized by divisive politics, protest, and even violent conflict. Again, if the ethical case does not persuade, the pragmatic one should.'[72]

121. A third question could be asked about areas which are given too little weight. Should key *global public goods*, such as minimising the extent of climate change (CO_2 levels are already one indicator) be addressed more directly, or would this detract from a focus on sustainable pro-poor development? This is also linked to the issue raised in Section 2 of whether any new Goals should be set primarily to be relevant at the level of developing countries (individually or as a group or groups) or more explicitly at the global level (including tough issues about the sustainability of 'Northern' life-styles). The issue is particularly clear-cut in relation to climate change, where global targets, with distinctions between groups on the action to be taken, may indeed be set well in advance of 2015.

122. Goal 8 is of a different character than the first seven goals. It is interesting that the OECD-DAC, a donor group, did not incorporate a separate goal for its own members, though the logic of *Shaping the 21st Century* was to support the case for enhanced aid and for more coherent policies towards developing countries (as well as for meeting human rights and standards of good governance). The inclusion of Goal 8 in the MDGs was certainly seen by developing countries as a very necessary balance to what might otherwise have seemed a call for action by themselves with no matching support from the rich countries. As noted above, there has been 'push-back' from the previous US Administration at the lack of some recognition in Goal 8 of some indicators of poor countries' own responsibilities. But equally, many would – with a good deal of logic – criticise the absence in Goal 8, unlike every other goal, of any time-bound targets.

123. Despite its evident weaknesses, the inclusion of a Goal which recognises the responsibilities of all countries for tackling problems of serious poverty has surely been the right choice. As suggested above, the inclusion in this Goal of policy actions as well as of resource flows is desirable, given the importance

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[72] Commission on Growth and Development (2008).

of the policy environment in which poor countries have to earn their living. The choice of such areas in the present Goal 8 is another matter, considered below.

124. Overall, the conclusion could be that the areas covered by the MDG framework are indeed appropriate, that some could be better specified, and that further discussion is desirable on the case for the coverage of additional areas relevant to tackling poverty in all its dimensions.

c) Parameters (i.e. Targets/Indicators)

125. As noted in Section 4 a) above, there is always a dilemma over how to capture the essence of a high-level objective with a limited number of targets or indicators. In particular, there is a well-recognised concern that targets may be interpreted in a narrow and slavish fashion, rather than being used as a broad guide to desired changes of behaviour. What follows is a brief sketch of some issues that have been raised about the chosen indicator set.

126. For *Goal 1 (Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger)*, there are now three Targets, one for income poverty, one for employment, and one for hunger, the first and last being in each case to halve the proportion under the specified level by 2015. The employment target 'full and productive employment and decent work for all' has no target date – not surprisingly for a target as yet reached virtually nowhere. As noted above, critics have focused particularly on the lack of indicators of empowerment and rights in this area. And of course, any poverty line is arbitrary, so that a literal interpretation would give a greater value to an increase in income from just below to just above the line than to perhaps more significant increases for those still below it.

127. *Goal 2 (Achieve universal primary education)* has been criticised from two directions. First, it has been argued that other dimensions of education (for example, pre-primary, secondary and tertiary education, and adult literacy) have been marginalised by the focus on this goal.[73] This would be another example of the

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[73] See, for example, Watkins (2008). There have been longstanding concerns about the effects of the Goal's focus on formal primary-school enrolment on other dimensions of basic education. The World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000 endorsed six goals for 2015, two of which map on to the MDGs (free and compulsory primary education for all and gender equality), but which also include expanding early childhood care and learning, promoting learning and life skills for young people and adults, increasing adult literacy by 50% and improving the quality of education.

MDG framework having potentially unfortunate side-effects at sector level, as noted in paragraph 68 above for health.

128. Secondly, critics have been concerned that the stress on 'getting children into school' risks undervaluing the critical question of attainment and the outcomes of schooling. There is certainly some inconsistency between the outcome-type goals in most areas and the output-type goal of universal primary education as opposed to educational attainment, as incorporated into the EFA Goals agreed at Dakar (footnote 68).The rapid rise in enrolment has, of course, put huge pressures on the capacity of schools and teachers to deliver quality education. However, an attainment target without continuing to target universal enrolment would not be the answer, as it could 'blind' countries to marginalised and excluded children.[74]

129. *Goal 3 (Promote gender equality and empower women)* is, by common consent, not best served by its single target on gender balance in schools (which would seem likely to have been very largely achieved by 2015), though the indicators have the merit of also including employment and parliamentary representation.[75] There is a general injunction in the present paradigm that all indicators should be disaggregated by sex (and by urban/rural) 'as far as possible'. If this were done more systematically, it would provide a much broader indicator set. The practical challenges of breaking down data by sex, income or geography would need to be tackled, and many developing country statistical offices would require additional assistance to cope.

130. *Goals 4-6 (Reduce child mortality, Improve maternal health, and Combat HIV/ AIDS, malaria and other diseases).* These goals have logical targets and indicators as far as the health sector itself is concerned. The issues may be rather:

- Whether it is desirable to allocate to health as much as three goals out of eight, when other areas such as education, gender and the environment were covered by one Goal. It would arguably be more consistent to have a single goal of better health for all covering the various targets.

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[74] But see also Filmer et al. (2006) for a cohort-based approach to a learning outcome target.

[75] See the 2007 Global Monitoring Report (World Bank/IMF (2007) for a discussion of gender indicators. Louis Kasakende has also suggested to me that the proportion of female officers in the police and judiciary be treated as an indicator in the context of violence against women.

- What to do about hard-to-measure targets (notably maternal mortality, which cannot be measured in many countries and for which 'attendance by trained birth attendants' is a very inadequate substitute).
- Should indicators be broadened to reflect the impact of other investments/ conditions on the health of the poor, such as major non-communicable diseases? Could a structure be found which would also provide a better incentive for investment in health systems (without departing from the logic of outcome-based targets)?

131. For *Goal 7 (Ensure environmental sustainability)*, the present targets are a rather curious mix. There is the 'double target' of integrating sustainable development principles and reversing the loss of environmental resources (without a date); a hardly-quantified target for reducing loss of biodiversity by 2010; and the water and sanitation and the slum improvement targets, both of which seem out of place under this heading. The overall structure is therefore far from satisfactory.

132. *Goal 8 (Develop a global partnership for development)* has several problems as at present structured. It contains no time-bound targets; it is complex (a 'kitchen sink' with 6 targets and 16 indicators); and it has no indicators which track the implications for poorer developing countries of the policies and actions of other developing countries, which will be increasingly important going forward (though to their credit several middle-income countries have published reports of what they are doing to assist). There is some awkwardness about the tracking of the percentage of ODA spent on 'basic social services' on the one hand and 'trade capacity' on the other without recognition of the need for ODA spending in many other directions (e.g. agriculture, institution-building, infrastructure).

133. Of all the Goals, this one is the most likely focus of difficult intergovernmental debate, since it poses direct challenges to UN member countries at every level.[76]

134. Overall, it is clear that there is scope for much debate over the selection of parameters. Nevertheless, a high proportion of them would probably be considered appropriate by most observers. Any limited set of indicators is bound to omit parameters that are considered important by those concerned with particular

[76] See MDG Gap Task Force (2008), which concludes that 'while there has been progress...important gaps remain in...the areas of aid, trade, debt relief, and access to new technologies and affordable essential medicines.'

aspects of development. But the greater visibility of the MDGs, compared to the full set of 'internationally agreed development goals', shows the attraction of a degree of parsimony in the selection of goals, targets and parameters. This means that the case for further expansion of any part of the MDG framework needs to be rigorously tested.

d) Period

135. The vast majority of the targets and indicators in the MDG framework are set for 2015 (the target for gender equality in education had a date of 'preferably by 2005' for primary and secondary education, the slum improvement target has one of 2020, while the HIV/AIDS treatment target from 2005 and the biodiversity target both set a very short target date of 2010). However, despite the formalisation of most of the targets in 2000-01, they also mostly had a base-year of 1990,[77] a result of the fact that the key UN sectoral conferences that gave rise to the various targets had met between 1990 and 1995. This may have been a logical consequence of the way the MDGs were developed, but it is a far from logical approach to target-setting.

136. From one point of view, therefore, the MDGs are 25-year targets (1990-2015), though from another they are 15-year targets (2000-2015). The fact that for most of them (the poverty goal apart) progress from 1990-2000 was below the average needed in order to be on track for achievement in 2015 gives a decidedly optimistic cast to what world leaders agreed in the Millennium Assembly, a full ten years after the base year (though it could also be seen as a rallying cry to tackle this problem).

137. The MDG experience suggests that it was unfortunate that the Goals were agreed so long after the base year, even though, of course, action was already in hand on many of them; however, the fifteen-year 'window' for delivery seems to have had a useful effect in galvanising action, at least at the level of international discourse. It could be argued that a 25-year period would have had a less positive impact. And the five-year period for which the World Social Summit of 1995 set most of its deadlines was perhaps too short to enable momentum to develop. So the 'de facto' fifteen-year period seems to be proving quite appropriate.

[77] The Millennium Declaration was not entirely clear about base year. The designers of the Annex to the Road-Map decided on 1990 for purposes of consistency and feasibility.

138. The longer the period chosen, the greater the risks that planned rates of progress (see below) will turn out to be wide of the mark. Revision of targets within a period might be one approach to tackling this issue, but it would, of course, call into question the original credibility of the targets. This is therefore a further argument against targets with a very long time-horizon.

e) Rate of Progress

139. As noted by Clemens, Kenny and Moss,[78] there is a history of the international community setting targets that there is no practical possibility of meeting. They argue that this can unreasonably paint as 'failures' developing countries which are in fact expanding services at rates well above those achieved by OECD countries. In the case of the MDGs, a particularly clear example of increasing 'stretch' is the application of the DAC's global poverty-reduction target to all developing regions and each developing country (as called for in the UN Secretary-General's 'Road Map' of 2001). Such a move might be desirable in principle, but targets that go beyond the reasonable limits of the possible tend to lose impact.

140. Many of the goals, for example, in health, appear to be extremely ambitious in relation to observed progress since 1990, despite the fact that they were based on rates of improvement drawn from the experience of the 1970s and 1980s.[79] The whole question of the relationship between progress at the global level and the specific priorities and actions needed at the country level is more complex than allowed for by simply downloading global targets to regional and country level. Nevertheless, the ability of every country to benchmark itself against other countries of comparable kinds is a really useful feature of the Goals.

141. While we may criticise over-optimism in target-setting, there is little point in setting targets which are virtually bound to be achieved, as was the case for the under-researched target to halve the proportion of the population under

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[78] Clemens, Kenny and Moss (2007).

[79] See Vandemoortele (2008) for the argument that most of the Goals were based on straight-line extrapolations of trends, and that too little attention has been paid to the relative ease of speed of progress at different levels of development. His argument would be consistent with more of an 'S-curve' pattern, where progress is at first relatively slow, then speeds up as institutions become stronger, and then gradually slows down as targets are approached. On this basis, the shortfalls in the rate of progress in health and education in many of the poorest countries are not surprising.

the absolute poverty level (if conceived as being at the level of all developing countries).

142. The conclusion here might be that some of the goals are inappropriately demanding, particularly if they are to be applied at the country level, and that the underpinning analytical work on which the targets were based should have been more thorough in some respects. No targets should be considered in future without serious analysis of the degree of stretch that they imply against known paths, and a considered decision should be taken on the appropriate degree of stretch to propose.

f) Global, Regional, National, Local?

143. There is considerable debate about how the MDG paradigm should be interpreted, particularly below the global level. On the face of it, the Millennium Declaration did not presuppose that the targets it set (Section 1, paragraph 2 above) should be reached in every country, with the exception of the targets for primary education and gender equality in education, which are to be achieved 'everywhere'. Yet a year later the Road Map document argued that the Millennium Development Goals should 'become national goals and serve to increase the coherence and consistency of national policies and programmes'. Even earlier, the DAC had stated, in its *Shaping the 21st Century* document, that the Goal of halving the proportion in poverty should be a global, not a national goal, though the proportionate reductions in infant, child and maternal mortalities should apply to all countries.

144. The various UN Conferences that had first sketched out most of the Goals were also not fully consistent. In some ways, the very first of them, the Education for All Conference at Jomtien in 1990, came up with the most satisfying formula. This stated (fuller text at Annex 2, paragraph 7) that:

'Countries may wish to set their own targets for the 1990s in terms of the following proposed dimensions:
1. Expansion of early childhood care and developmental activities, including family and   community interventions, *especially* for poor, disadvantaged and disabled children;
2. Universal access to, and completion of, primary education (or whatever higher level of education is considered as "basic") by the year 2000...etc.' (the full list of 'dimensions' is provided at Annex 2)

145. This approach, of setting global benchmarks and positively encouraging countries to set their own targets for the same dimensions, but at a pace that make sense for them, appears to retain the incentive effect of global target-setting with proper respect for national ownership along the lines reaffirmed at the Accra High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness and other forums.

146. In practice, of course, this is what happens anyway. Not every country will want to align itself exactly on the MDG targets. Sakiko Fukuda-Parr's analysis of PRSPs quoted in Section 3, paragraphs 74-77 shows that countries will often plan to progress at a different rate (faster in some cases but slower in others) than that implied by the MDGs. On this analysis, the attempt, agreed by the UNGA Summit session in 2005, to move swiftly to 'MDG-compliant' PRSPs seems not to have had the effect that its proponents had hoped for – whether because insufficient aid was seen to be forthcoming, or because countries had in practice other important priorities that they wished to accommodate within the resources available.

147. Does this mean that the attention that almost every MDG-related report pays to the number of countries that are on or off track to reach each MDG is a mistake?

148. I do not think so. What the many analyses show is important. Some Goals are looking very challenging for many countries (perhaps suggesting that they were too optimistic, or that there are significant prior conditions not yet in place in many countries). For others, probably indeed for most, there is a wide spectrum of achievement, and the cross-country analysis very usefully pinpoints those cases where the international community needs to do a better supporting job – for example, in fragile situations or particular regions. (The case of sub-Saharan Africa is obvious, but how many would have expected the Pacific to be the second-weakest performing region?)

149. So both regional and national analyses are highly desirable. It is when the MDG paradigm is seen as something that has to be 'delivered' everywhere, no matter what, that problems arise. The distinction that Sakiko Fukuda-Parr draws between the normative and evaluative functions of the paradigm on the one hand and its use as a planning tool on the other is therefore highly apposite. However, this conclusion carries the stark consequence that the achievement of the basic safety-net for poor people envisaged by Jean-Michel Severino will

take longer to put in place universally than we would all wish, with all the tragic consequences that that implies at the personal and family levels where this is not achieved. Hence the value of attempts to encourage more rapid progress wherever this is possible, and to hold donors to account for their promises. The work of the Millennium Project in quantifying the cost of achievement of the Goals at the national level has been very useful from this perspective, despite the evident fact that increased aid is a far from a sufficient condition for progress.

150. Finally, one area for further research is the impact of the MDG framework within countries. This would appear to have great potential as a rallying point for holding under-performing governments to account and putting issues of horizontal inequities squarely before the local political system (see paragraph 56). It would be useful to have more information on how far this potential is in fact being put to use, and whether there are ways in which such use can be further encouraged. This is of particular relevance to the many low- and particularly middle-income countries which are not aid-dependent but still face major problems of social exclusion or of remote or disfavoured regions, and where using their own tax revenues is the centrepiece of the political process.

Section 5: How can the Goals best continue to provide useful incentives for progress and for international support over the period to 2015?

151. The serious global economic downturn which started in 2008 presents a difficult environment for development progress and international support for it in the near future, after several years when the global economy was in robust shape. On the one hand, the downturn seems likely to cut expected growth in many poor countries, while on the other it is likely to put severe constraints on public expenditure in both developed and developing countries over a period of years, as the effects of the downturn feed through into higher spending in the short term and significant loss of expected revenue. It is also possible (but certainly not necessary) that it will serve to keep in place policies that are contrary to the interests of poor countries' growth.

152. Against this background, what was already a challenging task (many developing countries and regions off-track for the MDGs, many donor countries not expanding ODA in the rhythm needed to achieve agreed targets by 2010) becomes even more so.

153. There is thus a danger that the MDG framework will lose any incentive effect because it will be seen as totally out of line with reality, causing some to fault it as inherently unrealistic (along the lines set out by Clemens, Kenny and Moss), while others develop the argument that it was always too much geared to a view that the main constraint on development was lack of ODA, and that a very different development paradigm, built much less around ODA and much more around local revenue, local and international private flows, and reform of international economic and financial policies, should be preferred. Such an approach may seem better attuned to the 'G-20' world. So it is not at all impossible that the MDG framework will be treated as increasingly irrelevant, apart from some no doubt dismissive comments as 2015 approaches.

154. An alternative view would be that, precisely because the economic downturn poses a major threat to progress in the reduction of poverty, there is a need to re-assert the importance of development and of support for it, and that the MDG framework can be one element in sustaining this cause. There would indeed seem to be every case for a major effort to ensure that the effects of the

downturn on the poor (who are in many cases likely to be particularly affected) are minimised, both by policy action within each country and through supportive international policies and resource transfers. This applies both to actions that are very directly related to MDGs, such as sustaining investment in basic education and health, and to those which support the poor more broadly, such as social safety nets of all kinds.

155. Experience of other major financial and economic crises, such as the Asian crisis of 1997-98, suggests that the results can be very severe in the immediate term, particularly on employment and income (MDG1). In the medium term, some countries experience a quick 'bounce-back' (Korea, Thailand and Malaysia in the Asian case), while others have a much slower recovery path (e.g. Indonesia), depending on the severity of the initial shock, the robustness of public institutions and the quality of policy-making. Consequences for health and education may be longer term, not least if public expenditure is heavily constrained over a significant period by the downturn.

156. Against this background of very different development trajectories following major shocks, it would seem that the tracking of real-world consequences involved in the international effort to measure progress against the MDGs will become more rather than less significant in identifying major trends within and across regions in the impact of the downturn on the poor. The case for buttressing employment, defending the delivery of key social services and tackling the many issues surrounding sustainability is evident, and even though several MDGs will be 'lagging indicators', the regular highlighting of what the downturn means for the poor is likely to be strategically important at two levels at least.

157. First, at country level, it should help benchmark the situation in individual countries against that of their neighbours, and also identify in an internationally comparable way where the most significant consequences of the downturn are being felt. Secondly, at the international level, it may help support the case for both policy reforms and actions that will help poorer countries, given the many links that exist between economic performance in developed and developing countries (through access to finance, remittances, commodity price movements, export demand etc.), and for continuing investment in ODA in support of local efforts. MDG-based evidence will be important for advocacy groups in both donor countries and poor and middle-income countries affected by the

downturn, which in turn may affect what decision-makers judge to be 'politically possible'.

158. In order to do this, relatively more attention will need to be paid to the specific situations at regional and country level, as opposed to performance on the global aggregates. Because such a focus will put an even greater spotlight on the improbability of all countries recording MDG-compatible progress, it would be logical to put greater public emphasis on the concept that the MDGs are best seen as an internationally comparable way of gauging and so encouraging development progress, rather than as some kind of top-down blueprint that should determine every country's priorities. This would be consistent with the views of those who have argued for a broad, rather than a literal, interpretation of the MDG paradigm.[80]

159. But this needs to be combined with serious reflection on how to speed up progress in lagging countries and regions. This chimes well with the increasing focus on those who are living in 'fragile situations' of all sorts (which includes not just the countries usually so categorised, but lagging regions of major countries like India, China or Brazil). It should also be a spur not to let donors 'off the hook' of the promises that most of them have made about increasing aid flows, nor countries more generally that are continuing to fail to tackle global issues that impact on the poor, such as trade reform and climate change. Above all, it is important to avoid a situation in which the whole effort which the MDG framework is meant to encourage is seen as some sort of impossible dream, just because many MDGs are not achieved in many countries.

160. It will therefore be particularly important to ensure that there is a balanced and realistic account of progress against the MDGs, both before and after the onset of the downturn, and that major achievements (such as has been evident in recent years in many countries on school enrolment and infant mortality) are appropriately highlighted, as well as the shortfalls.

161. This analysis assumes that there is no mileage in considering any significant change before 2015 to the MDG framework as agreed in 2000-01. However,

[80] See, for example, Maxwell (2003); Adrian Wood, in a talk at the Overseas Development Institute in July 2007 entitled 'Taking the MDGs Seriously but not Literally', argued that, while the goals themselves are desirable, the time-bound targets risk setting up distortions, and that 'to avoid bad and/or inefficient outcomes, don't tie individual incentives to the numerical targets – and ensure people never lose sight of the broader goals'.

it would be consistent with existing practice to bear in mind possible indicators (which should be few in number) which might capture aspects of the economic downturn and financial crisis that are likely to be of most concern to poor countries, and which would need to be readily available.

Section 6: What Hypotheses deserve further study in considering the case for any framework for measuring and encouraging the progress of development after 2015?

162. It would be premature, on the basis of the limited and incomplete survey above, to make definitive statements about the case for and the possible shape of a framework for measuring and encouraging the progress of development after 2015.[81] (Indeed, the mere fact that 2000 marked a new Millennium illustrates that it may not be easy to gain agreement for a similarly ambitious international commitment to development progress in a year with a less striking designation.) Instead, this concluding section puts forward a number of hypotheses for further discussion.

163. A starting point has to be to consider the purpose of any such framework.

164. I have noted above that in this paper I have taken the purpose of the current MDG framework to be '*to encourage sustainable pro-poor development progress and donor support of domestic efforts in this direction*.' It would be particularly important in this context to have a better understanding of the ways in which international frameworks, such as the MDGs, actually impact on opinion-formers and decision-makers in the poorer countries, as suggested in Section 3 above. Without this, our knowledge of the extent to which a framework of this kind affects behaviour will be too much based on anecdote, and too little on evidence.

165. In the Millennium Declaration, the goals feature prominently in the section on 'Development and Poverty Eradication', which itself begins with the ringing statement that 'We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty'. 'Abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty' will unfortunately still be a feature of our world in 2015, despite the undeniable progress that is being made. Many poorer countries will still need significant flows of concessional resources, even though the sources of these will continue to diversify.

[81] Ideas are already being floated for new Goals. The Chronic Poverty Report of 2008-09 (Addison et al. 2008) argues for access to basic social protection for all poor and vulnerable people by 2020 and universal access to post-primary education by 2020, leading to the elimination of absolute poverty by 2025. The 'stretch' of such targets would appear to be considerable.

A first hypothesis is therefore that there is a prima facie case for a further set of indicators designed to encourage the effective tackling of the problem of absolute poverty in all its aspects, and also to encourage international support for it. (I have deliberately used the word 'international' rather than 'donor' in this formulation, because of the need to move away from a narrow view that achieving development goals is just a matter of aid, and because the actions of important countries outside the ranks of the 'traditional donors' will be increasingly important to the success or otherwise of development efforts.) This might be called the '*Why Measure?*' issue.

166. However, 2015 is not 2000. Several countries which were among the leading recipients of international aid in 2000 are likely to be providing at least as much concessional assistance as they receive by 2015. The dimensions of the development problem are gradually changing. The influence of global factors, whether climate change, financial stability or security concerns, seem likely to have greater weight in determining the progress of the poor as barriers between countries continue to shrink.[82]

167. This suggests that the approach of considering a set of indicators linked to absolute poverty needs to be tested against *a more 'one-world' approach that would be aimed at encouraging policy-makers in every country to give greater weight to tackling systemic global issues, of which absolute poverty would be only one.* Issues surrounding inequality, the global commons, security, global governance etc. would fit more naturally into such a broader approach, which would be truly global, but would need to address the outcomes sought in all countries, not just those in the increasingly outmoded category of 'developing countries'. Two concerns would be whether such a macro framework would be negotiable (it would pre-suppose very close cooperation across many policy communities and institutions), and whether it might lead to an under-weighting of the problem of poverty as opposed to other global issues.

168. *A second hypothesis is that key features of the MDG paradigm, as listed in Section 2, need to be tested against the experience of other ways of tracking and incentivising progress.* This is the *'How to measure?'* issue. The conclusion may still be that a target-based, multi-indicator, objective, top-down framework is the best option. The consensus on the MDGs should not be lightly thrown away.

[82] See, for example, Sumner and Tiwari (2009).

A degree of consistency between successive frameworks is surely desirable. Measurability must be a central concern, especially in poor countries. The value of what I called above the parsimonious approach (notably the limited number of headline Goals) is not to be discarded without good reason. But it should not simply be assumed that the MDG framework can just be replicated with minor adjustments.

169. Issues which require further analysis and discussion in this connection include:

- How to take account of new methodological ideas about measuring progress.
- The case for and against time-bound targets, as opposed to indicators. Dispensing with time-bound targets would get away from a one-size-fits-all approach, and facilitate a more bottom-up approach. But would it fatally weaken the incentivising effect of the present model, where arguably it is precisely the time-bound nature of the MDGs that gives them influence?
- Whether goals should be more consistently outcome-based (or, for example, include process-based elements).
- Whether subjective as well as objective measures should be included. But would this require a degree of sophistication that would make it hard to generate reliable data, and could such measures be sensibly compared across very different cultures and income levels?[83]
- Whether it would be possible to have a consistent set of goals for all countries (in principle including developed countries), but differential targets for countries at different stages of development: what might be called an 'iceberg' approach,[84] whereby highly visible global targets are complemented more explicitly by actionable, country-specific targets in the same domains that have their rationale at country level, and on which their planning and donor dialogue would be based.[85] This is in essence what was agreed at the Jomtien Education Conference (para 144 above).

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[83] The Gallup World Poll is already providing data on subjective well-being for all countries in the world. In theory, they could run, on behalf of a consortium of countries and international organizations, a targeted survey to complement the official data on objective aspects of well-being (personal communication from Enrico Giovannini, OECD).

[84] I am indebted to Lars Engberg-Pedersen for this metaphor.

[85] See Bourguignon et al. (2008) for arguments for the better integration of goals within national planning frameworks.

- Whether more 'bottom-up' approaches are to be preferred. Global targets and standards are attractive from the point of view of advocacy, both in poor countries and among donors, but every country has its own characteristics. How should the right balance be struck? Could a design built more clearly on nationally owned development strategies be achieved while still providing useful incentives for progress and for donor support? How could any international framework help to encourage all actors to support desirable changes at country level? The issue of horizontal inequalities (to use Frances Stewart's term) in well-being at the national level seems likely to become more rather than less important over time.

- Should there be some way of also encouraging benchmarking within regions with some common features?

- What base-line and what period should be used? Although 2015 data are unlikely to be available till 2017 in any depth, the level of progress reached by 2015 should be reasonably predictable from the data available for, say, 2012, and the knowledge of trends. So there would be no need to repeat the MDG experience of setting goals well into the period for delivery. As to period, there needs to be a discussion of what would maximise the influence of any new paradigm. As argued above, 5 years seems too short and 25 years too long: maybe the choice is between 10 and 15 years.

170. *A third hypothesis is that, within whatever methodological approach might be chosen, attention should be paid to the main critiques concerning areas that are missing from the present MDG framework, while maintaining the parsimonious approach to the number of Goals and Targets that have been important for the impact of the MDGs (*The *'What to measure?'* issue.)

171. This clearly depends on the outcome of the discussion of the purpose of any new framework. If the eradication of absolute poverty remains the centrepiece, many of the present areas would remain relevant, but issues such as empowerment, rights, security/fragile situations, vulnerability, human security and access to infrastructure services, would need to be debated. At the same time attention has to be given to practical issues such as the availability of information and avoiding demands on poor countries for information that richer countries do not produce. No framework will cover everything.

172. If the choice were rather to opt for a broader framework based around global public goods, including the eradication of extreme poverty, a much

broader discussion with the relevant policy communities would be necessary.

173. *A fourth hypothesis is that, in each chosen area, much work would be needed to establish what targets or indicators (depending on the overall architecture chosen) and what degree of 'stretch' would be appropriate.* Several existing targets and indicators would clearly require significant re-thinking (for example, in education some indicators of both post-primary access and educational achievement would seem desirable; in health there needs to be serious discussion of the appropriate stretch of any continuing targets for maternal mortality and child and infant mortality, and of how to follow the vague targets for HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases of 'beginning to reverse' incidence; in both gender and the environment, the indicator set requires very significant adaptation).

174. A successor to the present 'Goal 8' needs particular thought. There seems in principle a very strong argument for a goal that addresses the environment within which poor countries have to manage their progress and the support that they can reasonably require to maximise their progress. This has to do with resources (financial flows of all kinds, and particularly concessional flows), but also, and most importantly, with policies by all relevant actors, notably but not only the rich countries, that address more coherently issues that inhibit sustainable pro-poor development, including the need for a stronger voice by poor countries in international decision-taking. This requires building links in richer and major emerging countries that go well beyond the normal purview of development agencies.

175. This issue leads to another: who is accountable for the outcomes specified in the MDGs and any successor framework? There is no simple answer to this question, since the development process obviously involves a multiplicity of actors. Clearly, and in line with the Monterrey consensus, development is first and foremost the business of the countries concerned. But the responsibilities of other countries and of the international agencies are also significant. Any new framework should clarify what commitments the various parties are assuming and where responsibilities lie. Mutual accountability, much discussed in the context of aid effectiveness, is even more important here.

176. Careful judgements would be needed about the level of ambition for any time-bound targets. They should imply some 'stretch' over expected outcomes

in the absence of strong policies and enhanced resourcing, but this needs to be within the bounds of the possible. Unrealistic targets are very unlikely to change behaviour. Greater clarity is needed over how to relate global targets to what should be locally owned targets at the country level, perhaps following the model of the Jomtien Conference mentioned above.

177. Consideration of this set of issues leads to *a fifth and final hypothesis – that work needs to start soon on developing a consensus on the purpose, method, areas and responsibilities (the why, how, what and who) of any post-2015 framework, so that sufficient time is left for a serious and evidence-based discussion by individual policy communities on what might be appropriate targets and/or indicators in their areas of competence.*

178. How should any such consensus be developed? As Annex 2 demonstrates, the MDG framework emerged in a somewhat haphazard way from the product of modes of thought and the pressure of circumstances.[86] It may be unrealistic to suppose that a more structured approach could be developed for the future, despite the predictability of serious international discussion as 2015 approaches. Undoubtedly the current economic downturn will have a significant effect on thinking over the coming period. However, some pointers can be offered.

179. It is evident that any future process will need to engage a very wide group of actors, certainly including governments (of poor, middle-income and rich countries) and representatives of civil society and the private sector. Policy communities of all sorts will want their voices to be heard. Traditional donors will not be able to 'call the shots' to the extent that they arguably did via the DAC process in 1995-96.

180. This does not mean that a 'free-for-all' is the best way forward. In the first place, the UN should certainly have a central role, as it did in 2000-01. Only the UN General Assembly can give any post-2015 framework legitimacy. The UN Statistical Commission's role in indicator-setting also needs to be considered.

181. Secondly, it would surely be desirable to seek a consensus in the General Assembly some way ahead of 2015 (not later than 2013, I would suggest) on whether

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[86] The title chosen by David Hulme for his survey of how the paradigm was created is illustrative: 'Human Development Meets Results-based Management in an Imperfect World' (Hulme (2007)).

a post-2015 framework is desirable in principle, and, if so, what its purpose, method and broad areas of coverage should be. This should presumably be on the basis of a proposal from the Secretary-General, which itself should draw on a broad consultative process, which would probably take about a year and which might be facilitated by some sort of 'Wise Persons' Report', as was done for security-related issues after 9/11, or at least by some internationally supported programme of research.

182. On the basis of the discussion in this paper, elements requiring research include the following: the applicability of other methods of measuring and incentivising progress to the area of poverty reduction (and potentially other global public goods); the impact of the present MDG framework on public opinion and official action in both donor and recipient countries; possible disincentive effects of the present framework and how to overcome them, including smarter indicators; appropriate ways of combining global targets with locally owned target-setting in poor and middle-income countries; the case for and against broadening any successor framework to other global public goods; and the appropriate 'stretch' of any new targets.

183. Work is taking place on some of these issues (notably on alternative or additional measures of encouraging poverty-reduction in all its aspects), but there is no internationally coordinated framework for this, and there appear to be significant gaps still to be addressed.

184. Once a decision in principle on a post-2015 framework and (if favourable to a new framework) broad decisions on its architecture have been taken by the UNGA, the policy communities responsible for each chosen area can then be challenged to put forward a parsimonious list of indicators for the areas in question, which could either be validated by the General Assembly itself in 2015, or left, as at present, to a more technocratic process, with the General Assembly endorsing only the headline goals.

185. The year 2010 provides an obvious opportunity for the world to consider what process to adopt for considering the case for a post-2015 framework, and outline decisions on process could be submitted to any Special Session on progress towards the MDGs that the General Assembly might put in place that year. A timeline might therefore be:

- Fall 2010: outline UNGA decision on process (with no decision on whether a framework should be supported after 2015). Identification of key research topics.
- Spring 2012: Wise Persons' Report produced (if desired)/research delivered.
- Spring/Summer 2013: UNSG's proposals after consultative process.
- Fall 2013: UNGA decides whether to attempt agreement on a post-2015 framework, and if so, identifies its main characteristics.
- 2014: Policy communities propose indicators consistent with UNGA guidance.
- Fall 2015: new framework agreed by UNGA.

186. Finally, I would emphasise that any work should recognise the limitations as well as the potential of indicator frameworks as a means of incentivising progress. Discussions of drafts of this paper have brought out clearly the concern felt by many that 'MDG literalism' must be avoided because no indicator set can cover all the aspects of sustainable pro-poor development, and because it is all too easy for specific targets to be interpreted and used in a mindless way that does not recognise context, synergies and the need for experiment and risk-taking. The MDGs, and indeed all indicator sets, are good servants but bad masters. Any post-2015 framework should explicitly recognise this and indicate that any such framework needs to be used intelligently.

Conclusion

187. This paper has aimed to help stimulate thinking, based on experience with the MDG framework to date, about whether indicators can really encourage development, and in particular the sustainable reduction of poverty. While in many areas it has been possible to draw only preliminary hypotheses from the evidence, these already indicate some of the issues on which further work is required in order to draw some firmer lessons. It is hoped that the paper will contribute to consideration of how to maximise the positive effects of the MDG framework in the current international conjuncture, and of how to approach the question of further incentives after 2015 for sustainable pro-poor development in a changing international context.

Annex 1: Official list of MDG indicators

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Goals and Targets (from the Millennium Declaration)	Indicators for monitoring progress
Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	
Target 1.A: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day	1.1 Proportion of population below $1 (PPP) per day[a] 1.2 Poverty gap ratio 1.3 Share of poorest quintile in national consumption
Target 1.B: Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people	1.4 Growth rate of GDP per person employed 1.5 Employment-to-population ratio 1.6 Proportion of employed people living below $1 (PPP) per day 1.7 Proportion of own-account and contributing family workers in total employment
Target 1.C: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger	1.8 Prevalence of underweight children under five years of age 1.9 Proportion of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption
Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education	
Target 2.A: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling	2.1 Net enrolment ratio in primary education 2.2 Proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach last grade of primary school 2.3 Literacy rate of 15- to 24-year-olds, women and men
Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women	
Target 3.A: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015	3.1 Ratios of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education 3.2 Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector 3.3 Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament
Goal 4: Reduce child mortality	
Target 4.A: Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate	4.1 Under-five mortality rate 4.2 Infant mortality rate 4.3 Proportion of 1 year-old children immunised against measles
Goal 5: Improve maternal health	
Target 5.A: Reduce by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio	5.1 Maternal mortality ratio 5.2 Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel
Target 5.B: Achieve, by 2015, universal access to reproductive health	5.3 Contraceptive prevalence rate 5.4 Adolescent birth rate 5.5 Antenatal care coverage (at least one visit and at least four visits) 5.6 Unmet need for family planning

Goals and Targets *(from the Millennium Declaration)*	*Indicators for monitoring progress*
Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases	
Target 6.A: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS	6.1 HIV prevalence among population aged 15-24 years 6.2 Condom use at last high-risk sex 6.3 Proportion of population aged 15-24 years with comprehensive correct knowledge of HIV/AIDS 6.4 Ratio of school attendance of orphans to school attendance of non-orphans aged 10-14 years
Target 6.B: Achieve, by 2010, universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it	6.5 Proportion of population with advanced HIV infection with access to antiretroviral drugs
Target 6.C: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases	6.6 Incidence and death rates associated with malaria 6.7 Proportion of children under 5 sleeping under insecticide-treated bed-nets 6.8 Proportion of children under 5 with fever who are treated with appropriate anti-malarial drugs 6.9 Incidence, prevalence and death rates associated with tuberculosis 6.10 Proportion of tuberculosis cases detected and cured under directly observed treatment short course
Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability	
Target 7.A: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes, and reverse the loss of environmental resources	7.1 Proportion of land area covered by forest 7.2 CO_2 emissions, total, per capita and per \$1 GDP (PPP) 7.3 Consumption of ozone-depleting substances 7.4 Proportion of fish stocks within safe biological limits 7.5 Proportion of total water resources used
Target 7.B: Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss	7.6 Proportion of terrestrial and marine areas protected 7.7 Proportion of species threatened with extinction
Target 7.C: Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation	7.8 Proportion of population using an improved source of drinking water 7.9 Proportion of population using an improved sanitation facility
Target 7.D: By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers	7.10 Proportion of urban population living in slums[b]

Goals and Targets *(from the Millennium Declaration)*	*Indicators for monitoring progress*

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

Target 8.A: Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system Includes a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction, both nationally and internationally	*Some of the indicators listed below are monitored separately for the least-developed countries (LDCs), Africa, landlocked developing countries and small island developing states.* *Official development assistance (ODA)* 8.1 Net ODA, total and to the least-developed countries, as percentage of OECD/DAC donors' gross national income
Target 8.B: Address the special needs of the least developed countries Includes: tariff- and quota-free access for the least developed countries' exports; enhanced programme of debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) and cancellation of official bilateral debt; and more generous ODA for countries committed to poverty reduction	8.2 Proportion of total bilateral, sector-allocable ODA of OECD/DAC donors to basic social services (basic education, primary health care, nutrition, safe water and sanitation) 8.3 Proportion of bilateral official development assistance of OECD/DAC donors that is untied 8.4 ODA received in landlocked developing countries as a proportion of their gross national incomes
Target 8.C: Address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and small island developing states (through the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and the outcome of the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly)	8.5 ODA received in small island developing states as a proportion of their gross national incomes *Market access* 8.6 Proportion of total developed country imports (by value and excluding arms) from developing countries and least developed countries, admitted free of duty
Target 8.D: Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long term	8.7 Average tariffs imposed by developed countries on agricultural products and textiles and clothing from developing countries 8.8 Agricultural support estimate for OECD countries as a percentage of their gross domestic product 8.9 Proportion of ODA provided to help build trade capacity *Debt sustainability* 8.10 Total number of countries that have reached their HIPC decision points and number that have reached their HIPC completion points (cumulative) 8.11 Debt relief committed under HIPC and MDRI Initiatives 8.12 Debt service as a percentage of exports of goods and services
Target 8.E: In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries	8.13 Proportion of population with access to affordable essential drugs on a sustainable basis
Target 8.F: In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications	8.14 Telephone lines per 100 population 8.15 Cellular subscribers per 100 population 8.16 Internet users per 100 population

The Millennium Development Goals and targets come from the Millennium Declaration, signed by 189 countries, including 147 heads of State and Government, in September 2000 *(http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm)* and from further agreement by member states at the 2005 World Summit (Resolution adopted by the General Assembly: A/RES/60/1, *http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=A/RES/60/1).* The goals and targets are interrelated and should be seen as a whole. They represent a partnership between developed and developing countries 'to create an environment - at the national and global levels alike - which is conducive to development and the elimination of poverty'.

a   For monitoring country-poverty trends, indicators based on national poverty lines should be used, where available.

b   The actual proportion of people living in slums is measured by a proxy, represented by the urban population living in households with at least one of the following four characteristics: (a) lack of access to improved water supply; (b) lack of access to improved sanitation; (c) overcrowding (3 or more persons per room); and (d) dwellings made of non-durable material.

All indicators should be disaggregated by sex and urban/rural residence as far as possible.

Effective 15 January 2008

Annex 2: The Origins of the Millennium Development Goals

1. This annex does not claim to be a definitive history of the origins of the Millennium Development Goals, but is designed to summarise the main elements that came together in the Millennium Declaration of September 2000 and the 'Road Map' issued by the UN Secretary-General the following year. It distinguishes four stages:

   - Stage 1: The Impact of UN Specialist Conferences
   - Stage 2: The OECD-DAC role, set out in *Shaping the Twenty-first Century: The Contribution of Development Co-operation*, and the International Development Goals
   - Stage 3: From the International Development Goals to the Millennium Declaration
   - Stage 4: From the Millennium Declaration to the definitive listing in the Annex to the Secretary-General's Road Map of September 2001[87]

Stage 1: The Impact of UN Specialist Conferences

2. The MDG framework has its origin in a longstanding UN tradition of setting goals to be achieved internationally, well-known examples including the 0.7% target for aid as a proportion of donor GNP, or the targets for the 'water decade' of the 1980s. From the 1960s onward, fairly comprehensive goals were also set in a series of resolutions about 'development decades', the first proposed in the UN by President Kennedy, in which two key goals were adopted – one for economic growth of 5% (which was indeed achieved), the others of a 1% of GNP transfer (of private as well as public resources) to developing countries. It is, however, notable that very few such goals were accepted by the Bretton Woods organisations. Few of the early goals and targets had much public resonance apart from the 0.7% target.

3. However, the success shown by the strong adoption of goals for reducing child mortality by UNICEF and WHO in the 1980s demonstrated what a goal-oriented

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[87] 'Road Map' of Millennium Summit Goals, Timetable for Future Implementation', 19 September 2001 (http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2001/pi1380.doc.htm)

approach could achieve when countries, UN agencies and the donor community were mobilized for their achievement. It also showed that social progress was possible, in spite of the strictures of structural adjustment and the severe economic setbacks that many countries experienced. The goals for expanding immunization to 80% coverage were achieved by some 70 individual countries, and under-5 child deaths were reduced from some 15 million to some 12 million, despite the fact that per capita income fell in most of Sub-Saharan Africa and was stagnant in Latin America during the decade. This success created a more positive attitude to goals by many developing countries and by many donors, and was an important signal to those who designed the international conferences which were to follow.[88]

4. The period from 1990 to 1995 saw an unusually significant set of major UN-sponsored conferences on a series of subject areas important for development. These included:

    - 1990 Education for All Conference, Jomtien
    - 1990 Children's Summit, New York
    - 1992 UN Summit Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro
    - 1993 Human Rights Conference, Vienna
    - 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo
    - 1995 World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen
    - 1995 World Conference on Women, Beijing

5. Each of these followed the tradition of negotiating outcome documents which included major goals in their particular fields. The vast majority of these goals were aspirational and unquantified, but significant targets of a quantitative and time-bound nature were also agreed by the participating governments. The following paragraphs pick out a few features relevant to the subsequent design of the paradigm of the Millennium Development Goals.

6. The Jomtien Conference introduced its quantitative targets with a comment on the value of targets: 'Time-bound targets convey a sense of urgency and serve as a reference against which indices of implementation and accomplishment can be compared.... Observable and measurable targets assist in the objective evaluation of progress.' It pointed out that, 'As societal conditions change, plans and targets

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[88] I owe these comments to Sir Richard Jolly

can be reviewed and updated.' It argued that 'Targets need not be based solely on current trends and resources. Initial targets can reflect a realistic appraisal of the possibilities presented by the Declaration to mobilize additional human, organizational, and financial capacities within a cooperative commitment to human development.' This might be thought to bias its targets in something of an optimistic direction, but the Declaration also noted that 'Countries with low literacy and school enrolment rates, and very limited national resources, will need to make hard choices in establishing national targets within a realistic timeframe.'

7. It then came up with a formulation which combined national target-setting with proposed global 'dimensions', some but not all of them quantitative, as follows:

'Countries may wish to set their own targets for the 1990s in terms of the following proposed dimensions:
1. Expansion of early childhood care and developmental activities, including family and community interventions, especially for poor, disadvantaged and disabled children;
2. Universal access to, and completion of, primary education (or whatever higher level of education is considered as "basic") by the year 2000;
3. Improvement in learning achievement such that an agreed percentage of an appropriate age cohort (e.g. 80% of 14-year-olds) attains or surpasses a defined level of necessary learning achievement;
4. Reduction of the adult illiteracy rate (the appropriate age group to be determined in each country) to, say, one-half its 1990 level by the year 2000, with sufficient emphasis on female literacy to significantly reduce the current disparity between male and female illiteracy rates;
5. Expansion of provisions of basic education and training in other essential skills required by youth and adults, with programme effectiveness assessed in terms of behavioural changes and impacts on health, employment and productivity;
6. Increased acquisition by individuals and families of the knowledge, skills and values required for better living and sound and sustainable development, made available through all education channels including the mass media, other forms of modern and traditional communication, and social action, with effectiveness assessed in terms of behavioural change.'

8. Even though the actual quantitative targets, and notably that of universal completion of primary schooling by 2000, could fairly be criticised as hopelessly over-optimistic, this is a neat formulation of the case for global goals and national targets.

The Conference also wisely placed a focus 'both on universalization of access and on learning acquisition, as joint and inseparable concerns'. It added that, 'In all cases, the performance targets should include equity by gender', but concluded that 'setting levels of performance and of the proportions of participants who are expected to reach these levels in specific basic education programmes must be an autonomous task of individual countries'.

9. The World Children's Summit was the most detailed and ambitious in its target-setting, in line with the attention that UNICEF had given to quantitative targets since 1982. It set seven 'Major Goals for Children and Development in the 1990s', six of them quantified, and no fewer than 26 supporting/sectoral goals in the fields of women's health and education, nutrition, child health, water and sanitation, basic education and children in difficult circumstances. It dealt with the global/national issue in the following terms: 'These goals are recommended for implementation by all countries where they are applicable, with appropriate adaptation to the specific situation of each country in terms of phasing, standards, priorities and availability of resources, with respect for cultural, religious and social traditions. Additional goals that are particularly relevant to a country's specific situation should be added in its national plan of action.'

10. Of the other major meetings listed above, the World Summit for Social Development stands out as the most ambitious in its use of quantitative targets. It set thirteen commitments across the social sectors, in many cases repeating targets for 2000 that had been set at Jomtien and the Children's Summit, and setting new objectives for 2015. It was more prescriptive than the two preceding conferences in that it did not differentiate global and national-level target-setting, implying delivery in each country: 'Governments should implement the commitments that have been made to meet the basic needs of all, with assistance from the international community consistent with chapter V of the present Programme of Action, including, inter alia, the following [targets]....'

11. By 1995, governments had thus signed up to a very significant number of targets, mostly in the form of outputs and outcomes.[89] This would prove a fertile back-

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[89] A significant exception was the '20/20' input goal put forward by the Social Summit, under which both donors and recipients would allocate 20% of their programmes to the social sectors. This was, however, to be on a purely voluntary basis. The text reads: 'Agreeing on *a mutual commitment between interested developed and developing country partners t*o allocate, on average, 20 per cent of ODA and 20 per cent of the national budget, respectively, to basic social programmes.'

ground for the development of the Millennium Development Goals themselves. The degree of behavioural change that they created either within developing country governments or among the donor community is not clear, but it appears to have been disappointing, with little visibility beyond the specific policy community that had promoted the targets in question, and little traction on, for example, Ministries of Finance. What is certain is that almost every goal set by these meetings for the year 2000 was missed. And that was nothing new: as the Beijing Women's Conference observed, 'Most of the goals set out in the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women [ten years earlier] have not been achieved.' Why should any new target-setting exercise fare any differently?

Stage 2: The OECD-DAC role, set out in Shaping the Twenty-first Century, and the International Development Goals

12. The Development Assistance Committee brings together the main donor countries which are members of the OECD, one key role being to use mutual peer pressure to increase the volume and effectiveness of aid.

13. Following the break-up of the Soviet Union, many in the development community had envisaged a 'peace dividend' that would lay the foundations for increased ODA. However, in practice the sudden demands for assistance in the process of transition seem to have led to a significant switch of resources from traditional recipients of ODA towards the transition countries. This unpromising context was among the factors that led the DAC to establish, at its High Level Meeting in 1995, a process known as the 'Exercice de Réflexion' – in other words, a serious search for a new vision that would sustain the relevance of development assistance in a rapidly-changing world. This process was given momentum by further exchanges – in which Minister Jan Pronk of the Netherlands, with encouragement from Colin Bradford, chief economist of USAID, took a leading role – on the margins of the subsequent OECD Ministerial Meeting and at the annual 'Tidewater' meeting of bilateral and multilateral agency heads in Annecy that summer.

14. In the discussion on the margins of the OECD Ministerial meeting as to what this vision might look like, the Director-General for Foreign Economic Cooperation at the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Hirabayashi, proposed that one way to sustain a case for the continued investment of ODA

would be for DAC members to set some striking quantitative objectives (such as the halving of world poverty) against which the progress of development could be measured over the medium term. This would enable donors to show their taxpayers that the aid effort was achieving real results.

15. At a subsequent meeting organised by the Japanese Government in Tokyo in March 1996, to which developing countries in the region were invited, the Philippines Ambassador strongly counselled DAC members against setting new targets of this kind, and proposed instead that they should make use of the targets already set by UN conferences. This advice was broadly accepted, and the Secretariat set about assembling a shortlist of such targets in the domains considered to be of interest, which covered the reduction of income poverty, education, health, gender, the environment and good governance.

16. The main output of the 'Exercice de Reflexion' was a document, *Shaping the Twenty-First Century: The Contribution of Development Co-operation*, which was adopted by the DAC's annual High Level Meeting in May 1996. This document set out first a 'vision of progress' and secondly 'new strategies for the challenges ahead'. Both parts of the document have proved unusually seminal in the long line of attempts by the OECD DAC to encourage good practice.

17. The second part, not further considered here, stressed in particular the primacy of local ownership, the importance of aid volume and effectiveness, and the need for policy coherence, all topics that have continued to engage much international attention.

18. In the first part, the donor community made it clear that it viewed aid as essentially complementary to local efforts, while defending the contribution that it had made in the right circumstances. ('The record of the last 50 years, from Marshall Plan aid to the network of development partnerships now evolving, shows that the efforts of countries and societies to help themselves have been the main ingredients in their success. But the record also shows that development assistance has been an essential complementary factor in many achievements'). In a section clearly aimed at securing domestic support for continued investment in aid, it went on to recognise that 'those responsible for public money are accountable for its effective use. We have a duty to state clearly the results we expect and how we think they can be achieved'. It then proposed to select 'a limited number of indicators of success by which our ef-

forts can be judged…taking account of the many targets discussed and agreed at international fora'.

19. There followed a list of six quantitative goals, as follows:

    '*Economic well-being*:
    - a reduction by one-half in the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015.

    Social development:
    - universal primary education in all countries by 2015;
    - demonstrated progress toward gender equality and the empowerment of women by eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005;
    - a reduction by two-thirds in the mortality rates for infants and children under age 5 and a reduction by three-fourths in maternal mortality, all by 2015;
    - access through the primary health-care system to reproductive health services for all individuals of appropriate ages as soon as possible and no later than the year 2015.

    Environmental sustainability and regeneration:
    - the current implementation of national strategies for sustainable development in all countries by 2005, so as to ensure that current trends in the loss of environmental resources are effectively reversed at both global and national levels by 2015.'

20. In the discussions within the DAC, several delegations had argued for the inclusion of goals surrounding good governance and human rights. In the event, no quantitative goals were set in these areas, partly because of a lack of agreed indicators. Instead the report stated: 'Essential to the attainment of these measurable goals are qualitative factors in the evolution of more stable, safe, participatory and just societies. These include capacity development for effective, democratic and accountable governance, the protection of human rights and respect for the rule of law. We will also continue to address these less easily quantified factors of development progress.'

21. The document subsequently indicates the origin of each of the quantitative goals in the relevant UN conference. In the case of the target of halving the proportion in absolute poverty, which for many participants was key to the whole

structure,[90] there was no such basis. The report noted that 'this goal obviously goes only part of the way toward meeting the global poverty eradication target identified at [the World Social Summit in] Copenhagen.[91] But it seeks to give that target a concrete, attainable focus for the medium term.[92] Reductions of poverty on this order of magnitude have been achieved in individual countries; we are proposing a generalisation of those individual successes.'

22. OECD/DAC had in fact commissioned some economic work following the suggestion by Ambassador Hiryabayashi mentioned above. This suggested that halving the proportion (not the number) in absolute poverty at the global level might be achievable by 2015. Views in the DAC differed on whether this approach weakened the Copenhagen commitment to poverty eradication or represented a good first step towards it: hence the careful language used in the final document, as quoted above.[93]

23. The report also explained that members had considered and rejected setting any target for growth: 'we have concluded that a global growth target would be neither feasible nor useful to the formulation of country strategies.' This reflected the concern of some DAC members that there was no clear link between growth and the reduction of poverty, and ongoing controversy about the 'Washington consensus'.[94]

24. The report addressed the need for country-by-country implementation: 'While expressed in terms of their global impact, these goals must be pursued country by country through individual approaches that reflect local conditions and locally-owned development strategies.' Specifically on the income poverty target, it noted that, 'Obviously, this target will be much harder to reach in some countries than in others. But global averages are not enough. The objective must be pursued country by country, and substantial progress must be sought in all countries.' However, the report was not fully consistent in accepting a measure of differential perform-

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[90] As one participant put it to me, the poverty reduction target 'would get us away from the endless pressure from sectoral interest groups (to which, alas, the MDGs eventually succumbed, making the whole thing far too unwieldy)'. (Sir John Vereker, personal communication).

[91] The Copenhagen Declaration states that : 'We commit ourselves to the goal of eradicating poverty in the world, through decisive national actions and international cooperation, as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind.' No target date was set.

[92] Several (but by no means all) DAC member states had urged the Social Summit to adopt a time-bound goal for reducing poverty, but the G77 had resisted this, arguing that any timetable and metric for poverty reduction must be country-specific (personal communication, Jan Vandemoortele).

[93] Personal communication, former DAC Chair James Michel.

[94] Personal communication, Richard Carey.

ance among countries. Thus not only did the DAC endorse the goal of universal primary education, which by its nature required the same result in every country, but it also specifically stated, regarding the mortality goals, that 'The death rate for infants and children under the age of five years should be reduced *in each developing country* [my emphasis] by two-thirds the 1990 level by 2015. The rate of maternal mortality should be reduced by three-fourths during this same period.'

25. The report accepted that the goals chosen were partial. 'The particular indicators we have chosen reflect our judgement of their importance in their own right and as meaningful proxies for broader development goals. Our selection does not indicate any diminished commitment to other goals accepted by the international community, at international conferences or elsewhere.' Indeed, the report specifically noted upcoming conferences on human settlements and food security, which by implication might also add goals to the list in due time (as indeed was to happen in the Millennium Declaration in respect of slums and hunger).

26. In a somewhat ambiguous formulation on the purpose of the goals, the report stated not only that 'These targets are *aspirations for the entire development process, not just for co-operation efforts*', but, in the very next sentence, that 'They represent only a proposal of what we as donors consider to be *helpful measures of progress to inspire effective development co-operation*' [my emphasis]. There was thus some ambiguity over whether the main purpose, as conceived by DAC members, was to incentivise development or to make aid more effective (and, by implication, sustain public support for it).

27. The report recognised in any event that the goals could not be simply an affair for donors: 'Their achievement will require agreement and commitment from developing country partners, through their own national goals and locally-owned strategies. They can be realised only through concerted actions developed through a process of dialogue and agreement in a true spirit of partnership.'

Stage 3: From the International Development Goals to the Millennium Declaration

28. Agreed by the DAC these goals might be, but so what?

29. The OECD is an organisation which seldom enforces action by its own members, so it was in essence up to each member of the DAC how much attention

it paid to the goals, or indeed to the report as a whole. Clearly, non-DAC countries, whether donors or recipients of aid, were not in any way bound by the goals set by the DAC.

30. It would therefore have been no great surprise if the idea of selecting a few headline goals and target dates mainly from the huge number generated by UN Conferences had had little resonance. However, this was not to be the outcome. Instead, the DAC's 'International Development Goals' were clearly a principal influence on the similar but not identical Millennium Development Goals. Their brevity was quickly seen as an effective means of highlighting important dimensions of development and poverty reduction: 'less was more'.

31. This appears to have come about through a twin-track process. In the first, political track, a number of leading figures in the development community made the International Development Goals a centrepiece of their approach and embarked on a sustained campaign to build support for the concept. In the second, more technical track, an alliance was created at Secretariat level between the OECD, the UN (including UNDP and other funds and programmes and some Specialised Agencies), the World Bank and the IMF to agree indicators and to monitor progress against the goals established by the DAC.

32. A leading role in the political arena was taken by four development Ministers in DAC countries, Evelyn Herfkens of the Netherlands, Hilde Johnson of Norway, Clare Short of the UK and Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul of Germany.

33. For example, on arriving in office in May 1997, Clare Short commissioned a White Paper which, following a briefing by Sir Richard Jolly and others during her time as an Opposition spokesperson, gave the International Development Goals[95] a central place. The White Paper committed the UK to 'work closely with other donors and development agencies to build partnerships with developing countries to strengthen the commitment to the elimination of poverty, and use our influence to help mobilise the political will to achieve the international development targets', as well as to 'pursue these targets in partnership with poorer countries who are also committed to them.'

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[95] DFID regularly called them the 'International Development Targets', whereas the DAC itself called them 'International Development Goals'.

34. In more detail, the White Paper stated that 'There are two key elements which need to be in place if the fight to eliminate poverty is to succeed. The first is a clear set of internationally agreed policies and principles which promote sustainable development and encourage environmental conservation. These exist in the form of international targets for sustainable development based on UN Conventions and Resolutions. The key target is a reduction by half in the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015.' The White Paper then sets out the International Development Goals and says, 'We welcome and will promote them. They are achievable. In 2015, we will need to set further targets.' It states that the second key element is political will in both poorer and richer countries, and commits the UK government to 'translate it into action by refocusing our development efforts on poor people in a common endeavour to meet the internationally agreed targets so as to make our full contribution to the great task which lies ahead – the elimination of extreme poverty from the world in the lifetime of the present generation.'

35. The central significance of the International Development Goals is thus very explicit. Similar statements were made by a few other DAC members, but by no means by all.

36. The following year, the UK hosted the G8 Summit, which met in Clare Short's constituency in Birmingham. The G8 gave clear backing to the goals, despite some serious hesitation in the US Treasury and State Department over whether the goals accepted by their USAID colleagues in the DAC should be formally accepted by the US government as a whole. Their concern focussed on the poverty goal, which had no explicit basis in a UN text, and which was thought to be unrealistic (a judgement that seems to have turned out wide of the mark at the global level). Clare Short's advocacy in Washington helped resolve this problem,[96] and the Summit , having identified as one of the most difficult challenges that of enabling 'the *poorer developing countries*, especially in *Africa*, develop their capacities, integrate better into the global economy and thereby benefit from the opportunities offered by globalisation', duly concluded: 'We commit ourselves to a real and effective partnership in support of these countries' efforts to reform, to develop, and to reach the internationally agreed goals for economic and social

[96] Information provided by Brian Atwood, USAID Director at the time.
[97] Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative: Strengthening the links between Debt Relief and Poverty Reduction, IMF/World Bank, 1999.

development, as set out in the OECD's 21st Century Strategy. We shall therefore work with them to achieve at least primary education for children everywhere, and to reduce drastically child and maternal mortality and the proportion of the world's population living in extreme poverty.'

37. The four Ministers established a rapport while representing their countries in the IMF/IBRD Development Committee. This led to a meeting in Norway in mid-1999, hosted by Hilde Johnson at Utstein Abbey, at which the four mapped out some practical ideas for 'a conspiracy of implementation' in which the DAC Goals were seen as a key measure of success. The Ministers played a particularly important role in putting over to the President of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, and the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, Michel Camdessus, the relevance of the International Development Goals to the area of greatest international development focus at the time: resolving the debt problems of the Heavily-Indebted Poor Countries. Both quickly saw the value of highlighting the outcomes that the Goals provided. Wolfensohn was under strong pressure from NGOs to change the World Bank's approach, and both Wolfensohn and Camdessus could see the value of an approach that showed developing countries to be 'in the driving seat'.

38. The success of this advocacy, which had started well before the Utstein meeting, was well shown in a key paper prepared by the staff of the Fund and Bank for the Development Committee meeting in Fall 1999.[97] This noted that a long-term approach was needed, and that 'This long-term horizon is implicit in the multidimensional International Development Goals (IDGs) that organize various United Nations declarations into a number of internationally agreed targets for the year 2015 (relative to 1990). These include:

- Reducing the incidence of extreme poverty by half;
- Reducing infant and child mortality by two-thirds;
- Achieving universal enrolment in primary education;
- Eliminating gender disparity in education (by 2005).'[98]

39. It went on to observe that 'The International Development Goals provide the context for the formulation of country specific targets for poverty reduction....These

[98] It is interesting that neither the reproductive health nor the environment goals were included in this even shorter list. The fact that the halving of the incidence of poverty was not the product of a UN declaration is also glossed over.

goals are outcomes that reflect a multidimensional view of poverty, encompassing not only low income levels but also illiteracy, poor health and lack of access to services. To operationalize them for each country will require starting with a thorough understanding of the nature and locus (regional, occupational, ethnic, etc.) of poverty and tracing these characteristics to key determinants of the desired outcomes. Indicators can then be identified which could serve as proxies for measuring interim progress—until the passage of time allows measurement of changes in the prime outcome indicators.' This recognition of the value of intermediate indicators had resonance with the later structure of the MDG paradigm.

40. The paper also expressed a strong preference for outcome-type indicators, such as the International Development Goals, as opposed to targets for sectoral expenditure (by implication, the 20:20 concept).

41. The paper reported that consultations had showed that 'the NGO community was, in general, supportive of the use of international development goals drawn from various UN conferences and agreed by members of the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD, and was seeking practical ways of linking implementation of the HIPC Initiative to such goals', and that 'There was also general agreement in the comments from the official community that the goals in anti-poverty plans should be linked to these international development targets, and made operational through monitorable social indicators to be attained within specific time-frames.' It went on to observe that 'These goals should be modified as necessary to reflect local conditions, and be incorporated into the overall anti-poverty framework.'

42. The paper, which was broadly endorsed by the Development Committee, ensured that attention was paid to the IDGs as the first round of Poverty Reduction Strategies was prepared, giving them greater traction. It can be seen as marking the full acceptance of the International Development Goals by the Bretton Woods institutions: indeed Michel Camdessus was prominent in advocating delivery of what he termed the 'seven pledges'.

43. Similar advocacy was meanwhile taking place with the UN, where the Secretary-General was putting together his report to the Millennium Assembly. This would be a more complex process, given the dynamics of the UN system,[99]

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[99] See Hulme (2008).

and technical collaboration would be one important way of achieving results.

44. In parallel with the political track, a good deal of activity was taking place at secretariat level between the OECD, the UN Secretariat, UNDP and other funds and programmes and some Specialised Agencies, the World Bank and the IMF, in order to develop an integrated strategy for monitoring progress towards the goals.[100]

45. The first key step was a joint OECD/UN/World Bank seminar on indicators of development progress in May 1997. This provided a forum for DAC Members and development partners, as well as the host agencies, to review the concepts, methodologies and data issues in the field of development indicators. The seminar agreed to establish working groups in each of the major fields covered by the goals and called for the preparation of a strategy document, setting out shortlists of indicators and outlining the implications for information systems and administrative procedures, to be presented for support in a second broadly-based conference early in 1998.

46. Over the following months, these working groups discussed in detail the indicators available in their respective fields of interest and consulted others about the most appropriate choices. They recommended which indicators should be included in a core set for monitoring development progress. The OECD Secretariat, the United Nations and the World Bank then collaborated to produce a synthesis of these proposals. This became the base document for a second meeting with wider participation, held at the World Bank Paris Office in February 1998.

47. As examples of the technical work carried out at this time, the group concluded that, while some goals could be adequately monitored by a single indicator (e.g. infant and child mortality), others required additional indicators. In education, for example, retention rates needed to be added to enrolment data to capture whether children are staying at school and achieving at least a basic education. Similarly, the limited coverage and reliability of data on maternal deaths led to the choice of an additional, related indicator for coverage of pregnancy-related care. On the other hand, some indicators would address more than one goal, reflecting the interrelationships between the key goals. Thus access to safe water,

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[100] I am indebted to Brian Hammond of OECD for much of the account that follows.

while included as an environment indicator, was recognised a major prerequisite for cutting child mortality rates and improving the quality of women's lives.

48. The work of the technical group resulted in elaborating the set of seven[101] International Development Goals with 21 'indicators'. For example, the poverty reduction goal had four: incidence of extreme poverty, poverty gap ratio, consumption share of the poorest quintile, and child malnutrition. Although these indicators might be presented as merely technical, they did allow in significant dimensions that had not been directly mentioned in the headline goals.

49. The agreed set of indicators was then presented to the DAC High Level Meeting in April 1998. After the presentation, Clare Short of DFID and Gus Speth, head of UNDP, asked the DAC Secretariat to 'take the work to the UN' – a prescient call given the subsequent history.

50. The Goals themselves had already been listed in a box in the UNDP's Human Development Report of 1997, and also featured in the World Bank's World Development Indicators from 1998 onwards.[102] And in April 1999, UN agencies adopted a revised set of guidelines for the production of Common Country Assessments and for the UN Development Assistance Framework that included in their 40 indicators most of the 21 on which the technical group had agreed – a useful step in minimizing the call on developing countries for different information on the same topics.

51. But the first public product of this collaboration became visible when Kofi Annan, Donald Johnston, James Wolfensohn and Michel Camdessus put their names to a document entitled 'A Better World for All' (www.paris21.org/betterworld) on behalf of the UN, OECD, IBRD and the IMF respectively. This was launched by Kofi Annan at the World Social Summit Plus 5 in Geneva in June 2000, which brought sharply into focus not just the existence of the Goals developed by the DAC, but also the degree to which they had now been accepted by key international organizations. The concept of a high-profile report of this kind

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[101] The maternal mortality goal was presented separately from the infant and child mortality goals.

[102] The Foreword to the 1998 WDI stated: 'This year's *World Development Indicators* begins with the first of a series of annual reports we plan to publish on progress toward the international development goals. The main – and not surprising – message is that these goals are difficult to attain. Countries that have succeeded in these areas have done so by sustaining economic growth, investing in their people, and implementing the right policies. But as the recent difficulties in East Asia warn, good and open governance that builds a social consensus is equally important. Without it, success can prove brittle.'

had its origin in a decision of the G8 Summit at Koln in 1999 to have an annual report on the alleviation of poverty,[103] and a subsequent proposal from DAC Chair Jean-Claude Faure for the DAC, the International Financial Institutions and the UN to come together in drawing up such a report.[104]

52. However, 'A Better World for All' sparked some very strong negative reactions, not least from civil society groups.[105] One line of attack was that the document was objectionable in procedural terms, because, without consulting UN members, the Secretary-General of the UN had co-signed an important and highly visible document with the World Bank, the IMF and the OECD. 'Bretton Woods for All', some called it. Another concern was with the substance of the report. This concerned less the main part of the report, which was on monitoring the International Development Goals (although the fact that these goals had not been approved as such by a UN process was noted). But the section on policies to speed up progress ('What will it take') was seen by many civil society activists and some developing countries as being too neo-liberal, not least in its references to the virtues of lower trade barriers in developing countries, a highly sensitive issue in the wake of the WTO meeting in Seattle in 1999. There was also a feeling that, despite references to more aid and to removing protective barriers, the absence of any goals, targets and indicators for developed countries showed a serious lack of balance – a concern that was to lead to the establishment of 'Goal 8' in the MDG framework.

53. So while the period 1996-2000 saw the idea of a limited number of development goals gain a lot of impetus, there remained a significant question over the scope for world-wide agreement on what these goals should be.

54. It should also be noted that the period also saw the start of a new drive to help build evidence for policy-makers through a new initiative on capacity-building for national statistical systems in developing countries – the Partnership in Sta-

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[103] "We reaffirm our commitment to contribute to the achievement of economic and social development in Africa, Asia and Latin America. We will review the situation in that regard every year, on the basis of reports by the IFIs and the relevant regional development banks, on the alleviation of poverty.' Koln G8 Summit communiqué.

[104] Personal communication, Brian Hammond.

[105] A letter to the UN Secretary-General from the World Council of Churches said that the report was received with 'great astonishment, disappointment and even anger' and as 'a propaganda exercise for international finance institutions whose policies are widely held to be at the root of many of the most grave social problems facing the poor all over the world and especially those in the poor nations'. Text at http://www.wcc-oe.org/wcc/news/press/00/22pu. html

tistics for the Twenty-First Century, or PARIS21. Created in November 1999, PARIS21 had a mandate to raise awareness of the importance of well-managed statistical systems to set and monitor effective development policies, but have over time developed beyond mere advocacy to become an increasingly significant catalyst for the development of national statistical development plans and as a venue for bringing policy-makers and statisticians together around an agenda of evidence-based policies. The importance of this initiative (which was followed by a number of other initiatives in the same general area) has been made increasingly evident by the gaps in data which the more serious attention being given to internationally agreed goals has inevitably highlighted.

Stage 4: From the Millennium Declaration to the Millennium Development Goals in the Annex to the Secretary-General's Road Map of September 2001

55. Kofi Annan put forward his proposals for the Millennium Declaration in a document entitled 'We, The Peoples' in March 2000. The document covered a wide spectrum, including a chapter on 'Freedom from Want', consisting of a quite eclectic survey of desired decisions, ranging from poverty reduction to trade, and from HIV/AIDS to ICT. Many areas called for progress, but without reference to time-bound targets. However, the Secretary-General called for time-bound targets in a few areas, including education, HIV/AIDS, the 'Cities without Slums' initiative, and also the DAC poverty target. In relation to the latter, the Secretary-General called on 'the international community at the highest level—the Heads of State and Government convened at the Millennium Summit—to adopt the target of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty, and so lifting more than 1 billion people out of it, by 2015.' However, Kofi Annan went beyond the DAC in further urging that 'no effort be spared to reach this target by that date in every region, and in every country' – clearly an altogether more demanding objective than that set by the DAC.

56. Several of the DAC Goals were not mentioned as such (infant and child mortality, maternal mortality and reproductive health). In a separate chapter on sustainability, time-bound targets were proposed for 'reducing by half, between now and 2015, the proportion of people who lack sustainable access to adequate sources of affordable and safe water', but the DAC environment Goal did not feature

57. The summary which closed the report proposed the five time-bound targets listed above (poverty, education, promoting gender equality in schools, drinking water, halting and beginning to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, and the slum improvement target, this last with a 2020 date). In addition, this part of the summary stressed the need to develop strategies that would give young people everywhere the chance of finding decent work; to ensure that the benefits of new technology, especially information technology, were available to all; and that every national government should from now on commit itself to national policies and programmes directed specifically at reducing poverty, to be developed and applied in consultation with civil society. The degree of fit with the International Development Goals, to which the Secretary-General also put his name just a few months later in 'A Better World for All', was therefore quite modest.

58. Importantly, the report continued with a set of pleas to the richer countries to deliver in the areas of trade, aid and debt, to address issues concerning pharmaceuticals, and to promote private investment.

59. Following much discussion and iteration,[106] the Millennium Declaration itself, accepted by every UN member state, included a significant list of time-bound targets in a key paragraph, quoted in the main document, but repeated here for ease of reference:

'We resolve further:
- To halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of the world's people whose income is less than one dollar a day and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger and, by the same date, to halve the proportion of people who are unable to reach or to afford safe drinking water
- To ensure that, by the same date, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and that girls and boys will have equal access to all levels of education
- By the same date, to have reduced maternal mortality by three quarters, and under-five child mortality by two thirds, of their current rates
- To have, by then, halted, and begun to reverse, the spread of HIV/AIDS, the scourge of malaria and other major diseases that afflict humanity
- To provide special assistance to children orphaned by HIV/AIDS
- By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at

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[106] See Hulme, op. cit.

least 100 million slum dwellers as proposed in the 'Cities without Slums' initiative.'

60. This list is, of course, easily recognisable from the DAC list (much more so than in the Secretary-General's report), and indeed, very importantly, it represented the first UN endorsement of the goal of halving poverty, now clearly defined using the $1 a day metric. However, it omitted the reproductive health goal, to which a group of UN members maintained strong opposition, as well as any time-bound environment goals (though a separate section addressed environmental issues). On the other hand, it incorporated goals for hunger, drinking water, HIV/AIDS and slums, none having featured in the International Development Goals (though child nutrition was already an indicator). Also, the Declaration set a large number of goals without a specific timeline in a whole series of fields. The General Assembly therefore commissioned the Secretary-General to produce a 'road map' of how to implement the Declaration as a whole.

61. Discussion of how to assemble a definitive list of specific goals, targets and indicators took place over the next few months. An important seminar on the International Development Goals in March 2001 at the World Bank, but attended by most of the key agencies, noted the scope that still remained for incoherence between the existing International Development Goals and the set endorsed by the General Assembly. It also encouraged their effective merger, recognising the legitimacy conveyed by the Millennium Declaration, but also the value of keeping the list of goals short, or, as Mark Malloch Brown, then Administrator of UNDP, put it, having a 'controlled expansion' that could serve as a basis for global political mobilisation.[107]

62. As part of the preparation of the Road Map, a group of staff from the UN (Secretariat, Funds and Programmes, and several Specialised Agencies), OECD, IMF and World Bank, slightly expanded from that which had drafted the 'Better World for All' document, reconvened in June to July 2001 under the chairmanship of Michael Doyle from the UN Secretary General's Office. Its task was to agree a set of goals that would highlight key commitments in the Millennium Declaration that could be quantified, and for which there were established indicators for which reasonable data existed.

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[107] Information supplied by Colin Bradford, who strongly advocated such a merger of the IDGs and the product of the Millennium Declaration to the meeting.

63. The group went carefully through the content of the sections of the Millennium Declaration which covered development and poverty reduction and protecting the common environment. A clear distinction was made: first, that the goals and targets must respect the language and content of the political process in the General Assembly that led to the Millennium Declaration; and secondly, that the statistical experts could advise and suggest the appropriate indicators for these goals and targets. The group sought to deliver faithfully the decisions taken at the UN (e.g. to exclude a reproductive health target from the Declaration and to put emphasis on the agenda around trade, aid, debt, youth employment, access to pharmaceuticals and ICT). At the same time, the OECD at least wished to see the maximum coherence with the list published in *Shaping the Twenty-First Century* and to ensure that all 21 IDG indicators were included, even though some of the goals had changed.[108]

64. The results of this exercise, a framework containing 8 Goals, 18 Targets and 48 Indicators, were annexed to the Secretary-General's Road Map of 2001. This list became the authoritative statement of the MDG framework, despite the fact that, ironically, it was never endorsed as such by the General Assembly, not least because of both US and G77 reservations (from different perspectives) about aspects of Goal Eight. Instead the relevant resolution, though adopted without a vote, recommended that the Secretary-General's report 'Road map towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration' be considered 'a useful guide',[109] and the UN Secretariat emphasised to Member States that the MDGs were merely the development goals of their Millennium Declaration, and that the indicators were merely those that helped to fulfil Member States' mandate to the Secretariat, adopted in the same Resolution, to monitor progress towards implementing the goals of the Millennium Declaration.[110]

65. How much of this was new? In essence, Goals 1-5 and Goal 7 were based closely on the International Development Goals, Goal 6 (HIV/AIDS) replaced the reproductive health goal, and Goal 8 was entirely new. The changes at this level were therefore limited but important. At the Target and Indicator levels, the main feature was a considerable expansion of the IDG framework, reflecting the relatively comprehensive nature of the Millennium Declaration. While this

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[108] In the event, all were maintained except for the process indicator of national strategies for sustainable development.

[109] See Fifty-sixth General Assembly GA/9999 Plenary, 14 December 2001, 86th Meeting.

[110] Michael Doyle, quoted in a personal communication from Brian Hammond.

rendered the structure a good deal more complex (and would be further expanded subsequently), the retention of a tight focus at Goal level appears to have been important in maintaining the 'less is more' philosophy of the IDGs.

66. But undoubtedly, the key achievement was agreement on a paradigm that had near-universal acceptance and covered a large part of the development and poverty agenda.

End note: The Inter-agency and Expert GROUP on THE Millennium Development Goal Indicators (IAEG)

67. The Inter-agency and Expert Group on the Millennium Development Goal Indicators was set up as such in 2002. It is responsible for data development and analysis of the assessment of trends in the implementation of the Millennium Declaration. The group includes the United Nations Secretariat, a number of UN agencies, IMF, OECD and the World Bank, national experts from statistical offices, and representatives from other organizations concerned with the development of data for the MDGs at the national and international levels, such as PARIS21 and the Inter-American Development Bank.

68. The annual report prepared by the group is used to inform the report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on the implementation of the Millennium Declaration. The group is also concerned with the development and application of standard statistical concepts and methods for national and international uses in compiling data for the MDG indicators and includes thematic sub-groups that work on specific areas identified among those needing more urgent attention.

69. This group meets at least once a year to review methods, standards and available data for the agreed indicators, and it reviews and analyses trends for each of the quantifiable goals and targets. It also reviews and discusses international and national initiatives for the promotion and coordination of technical cooperation with countries to improve their ongoing statistical programmes to provide basic data for the Millennium Development Goal indicators.

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