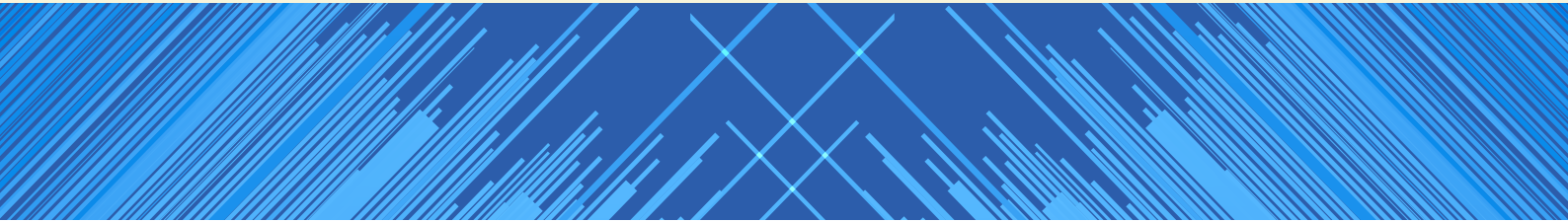




Southern Voice

2015 On Post-MDG International Development Goals



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The Post-2015 Development Agenda *Learning from the MDGs*

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THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA
Learning from the MDGs

Southern Voice Occasional Paper 2

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First Published April 2013

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ISSN 2307-9827 (Online)

ISSN 2307-681X (Print)

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Cover Design by

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Preface

The *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs) constitute one of the ideas of the United Nations (UN) that has literally changed the world. Conversely, the actual state of delivery of the MDGs continues to remain a matter of intense debate. With the 2015 deadline drawing near, the international development community remains preoccupied with reflecting on 'MDGs' future'. Indeed, an explicit understanding seems to have emerged that the MDGs are going to continue beyond 2015 in one form or another. Consequently, questions are being asked about the processes that are being followed to decide on the substance of the post-2015 international development goals as well as about what would be their distinguishing features.

The *Southern Voice on Post-MDG International Development Goals* is a network of 48 think tanks from Africa, Latin America and South Asia that has identified a unique space and scope for itself to contribute to this post-MDG dialogue. By providing quality data, evidence and analyses that derive from research in the countries of the global South, these think tanks seek to inform the discussion on the post-2015 framework, goals and targets, and to help give shape to the debate itself. In the process, *Southern Voice* aims to enhance the quality of international development policy analysis, strengthen the global outreach capacity of Southern think tanks, and facilitate professional linkages between these think tanks and their respective governments.

The initiative emerged in Cape Town, South Africa in June 2012 at a meeting of awardees of the Think Tank Initiative (TTI), a multi-donor facility managed by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), in Ottawa, Canada. Since then, the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) has further conceptualised the initiative and prepared its programme document through a consultative process with the other think tanks. The initiative was launched to various stakeholder groups including the larger development community in November 2012. Subsequently, CPD organised an expert group meeting in Dhaka on 11-13 January 2013, to set the agenda for the initiative. The key outcome of the Dhaka meeting was captured in the document *First Approximations on Post-MDG International Development Goals*, which was forwarded as a contribution to the High Level Panel appointed by the UN Secretary General to draft the post-2015 framework.

It is reckoned that the guiding spirit and initiative of the programme will rest with the Southern think tanks, but it will operate as an *open platform*, where concerned institutions and individuals from both the South and the North will interact with the network members. This approach will help to enhance the quality of international development policy analysis, strengthen the global outreach capacity of Southern think tanks, and facilitate professional linkages among these institutions as well as with their respective governments.

Southern Voice Occasional Papers are based on inputs received at various platforms of the initiative. The present paper draws on the special address delivered by *Professor David Hulme*, Executive Director of the Brooks World Poverty Institute, University of Manchester at a session of the Dhaka Expert Group Meeting. The paper takes a critical view regarding the globalisation of poverty reduction efforts through the MDGs and their implementation. *Professor Hulme* also delineated some lessons from the MDG experience for the South.

In connection with the launch of the *Southern Voice on Post-MDG International Development Goals*, I would like to thank *Professor Mustafizur Rahman*, Executive Director, *Ms Anisatul Fatema Yousuf*, Director, Dialogue and Communication, *Dr Fahmida Khatun*, Research Director and *Dr Khondaker Golam Moazzem*, Additional Director (Research) of the CPD for their support in getting the *Southern Voice* off the ground. I recall with thanks that a number of CPD colleagues have worked hard in rapporteuring the sessions of the Dhaka Expert Group Meeting and preparing the transcriptions of the presentations and comments.

On this occasion, I would like to recall with gratitude the contribution of *Dr Peter Taylor*, Acting Programme Leader, Think Tank Initiative (TTI) in shaping the *Southern Voice on Post-MDG International Development Goals* and taking the initiative forward.

I would also like to acknowledge with thanks the contribution of *Ms Mahenaw Ummul Wara*, Research Associate, CPD for coordinating the publication process, *Ms Nazmatun Noor*, Deputy Director, Dialogue, CPD for copy editing, *Ms Erin Palmer* for the stylistic editing of the papers, and *Mr Avra Bhattacharjee*, Deputy Director, Dialogue, CPD for designing the cover of the series.

I hope the engaged readership will find the document stimulating.

Dhaka, Bangladesh
15 April 2013

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Acronyms

BWI	Bretton Woods Institution
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EU	European Union
GNI	Gross National Income
HLP	High-level Panel
IDT	International Development Target
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MCA	Millennium Challenge Account
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MTEF	Medium Term Expenditure Framework
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US	United States
USD	United States Dollar
WTO	World Trade Organization

The Post-2015 Development Agenda

Learning from the MDGs

David Hulme

The MDGs: Globalising Poverty Reduction

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are very much associated with the 'Millennium Moment' in 2000 when world leaders had to find a way of promising that the new millennium would be much better than the old one. Unfortunately, as we move towards 2015 we are not under the same symbolic time pressure, so the need for a new agreement is much less evident to the rich and powerful. That Millennium Moment provided a unique opportunity to redefine development and to shift from 'business as usual' to a more radical and transformational agenda.

Unfortunately, that opportunity was not seized; although conceptual shifts did occur: thinking about global poverty reduction as human development, using Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) to help low-income countries plan poverty reduction efforts, using the 'dollar-a-day' measure of poverty as a global yardstick for assessing poverty (and encouraging politicians to think there was an easy means of assessing progress), and increased talk about innovative finance for development.

Despite these shifts, development remained business as usual, with no foundational change in what was (and still is) happening. Rich countries continue to make pious statements about their commitments to a fairer world trade regime and mitigating global warming without changing their policies. Developing countries talk about reducing poverty without reforming domestic governance or improving service delivery. This makes me wonder whether the post-2015 development agenda is a mere footnote to more important global processes, and is distracting us from more pressing issues, such as reforming World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) governance structures or setting up an Asian Monetary Fund. If we are looking at a post-2015 development agenda then we must not take our eyes off other agendas that may be more important, the way we did when we forged the original MDGs. For example, that the World Bank and the IMF retained control of national planning in aid recipient countries may have been much more significant than the MDGs themselves, because PRSPs – and later Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs) – have remained under the control of these two institutions.

When I originally started to research the MDGs, I was a sceptic. The micro-level poverty analyses that the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (www.chronicpoverty.org) was conducting in Bangladesh and other countries in the early 2000s provided little or no evidence that the MDGs were having any impact on the ground. Were all the millions of actors and the tens of thousands of organisations involved in formulating and implementing the MDGs just pontificating? However, as I began to look

more closely at the MDGs, I found that the self-interested pontificating (to justify aid agencies and their budgets) was mixed with altruism. Many people were actively trying to use the MDGs to make the world a better place and find better pathways for reducing poverty.

By adopting a crude human development approach, the MDGs encouraged increased investment in education, basic health services and even gender equality. The goals were framed in results-based management terms because of their focus on foreign aid: the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) donors had to explain to their taxpayers that they were getting value for money, and because they did not trust their partners (developing country governments); they wanted a way to measure their performance – and threaten punishment (reduced aid funding) if they did not deliver.

Many Southern voices contributed to the content of the MDGs, particularly through the United Nations (UN) conferences and summits of the 1990s (see Hulme 2009a for details). These voices helped shape what went into the numerous summit declarations of the 1990s and into the Millennium Declaration. However, the final deal in March 2001 at the World Bank in Washington, D.C., was hammered out by representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Bank, IMF and OECD. The MDGs were based on the International Development Targets (IDTs) identified by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD back in 1996. While one can claim that UN and World Bank and IMF inputs are partly Southern, this final deal was based on Northern inputs and interests, with the interests of aid donors vastly outweighing any Southern voice.

There were two main Southern contributions to the MDGs. On the positive side, Goal 8 – to develop a global partnership for development – was a Southern demand. The MDGs had to include something about what the rich would do to support global poverty reduction. Even if the rich countries refused to set targets for Goal 8, they did at least had to sign up for negotiating fairer trade, tackling climate change and moving to more equitable global governance structures. So Goal 8 was a positive Southern breakthrough.

On the negative side, it was the global South that removed the goal of reproductive health for all from the final deal. An unholy alliance of the Vatican, Libya, Sudan and Iran manipulated the G-77 of the UN (the association of more than 130 developing countries), and forced the last minute removal of the reproductive health goal because of their conservative religious values (see Hulme 2009b for details). For the Vatican, reproductive health was equated with abortion on demand; for conservative Islamic countries it was seen as making family planning accessible to unmarried women and providing advice on reproductive health to women without their male relations being present.

MDG Implementation

While the MDGs could identify *what* was to be achieved they could not specify *how* those goals might be achieved. That was because *how* was too contentious for agreement to be feasible. The World Bank and IMF believed that economic liberalisation was the only way to make progress. By contrast, many UN agencies and Southern governments believed that heterodox policies (including state intervention in economic policy) were essential for growth and social development. My suspicion is

that this situation will continue as we move toward 2015. I think goals will be set, but when it comes to the *how* and the *who* of development, people will be discouraged from talking because it might block an agreement.

When we look at what happened last time when it came to plans and budgets, PRSPs and medium term expenditure frameworks (MTEFs) were essentially left to the IMF and the World Bank. Indeed, one could make an argument that the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs) were empowered by the MDGs. While the UN and its agencies celebrated the MDGs, the BWIs retained control of national planning (PRSPs) and budgets (MTEFs) in aid-dependent countries. In determining *who* implemented development the emphasis was on partnerships, but there was strong pressure that these partnerships should increasingly include private sector or charitable organisations.

States, businesses and non-government organisations (NGOs) were encouraged to move to co-production of public services. One of the potential benefits of the MDGs and PRSPs was that Ministries of Finance got involved in poverty reduction. This put poverty reduction 'on the map' in terms of budgets and state actions, because, in most aid-dependent countries, the Ministry of Finance has analytical capacity, and drives planning and programming. Making poverty part of this ministry's analytical agendas meant increased pressure to have accurate data on poverty; tracking those figures became part of ministry activity, alongside looking at standard macroeconomic indicators.

If one looks at development finance, and particularly at foreign aid, the MDGs played a significant role in stopping the decline in secular aid that started in the early 1990s. In response to the MDGs, most OECD countries increased their aid spending as a percentage of gross national income (GNI). This had particular impact in the United States (US).

President George Bush and his neo-conservative advisors had no time for aid. Indeed, they thought it was a waste of resources – only the private sector could create growth according to their thinking. However, in 2002, as a consequence of the MDGs, a Summit was held in Monterrey, Mexico, to determine how to increase finance for development. Bush dithered about whether to attend. On the one hand, he had said that Mexico was the US's most important partner, so it would look strange if he did not support the Mexican President who was chairing the Summit. On the other hand, if he went to the Summit it would be difficult for him to stand up and say that US was not increasing its aid budget when all the other OECD leaders would be pledging more money for aid.

In the end, external events took control. The Christian rock star, celebrity and anti-poverty campaigner Bono met with President Bush a few days before the Monterrey Summit, and after they talked and prayed together, Bush announced a USD 5 billion increase in US foreign aid. Bono thought this was a one-off, but it turned out to be an annual increase that established the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA). Through a totally unpredictable route the MDGs led anti-foreign aid President Bush to increase the US foreign aid budget more than any other President had in 50 years before!

MDGs Contribution to Development Outcomes

The contribution of the MDGs to development is hard to assess because identifying causality is extremely difficult. The MDGs are only one factor in the very complicated processes of national development. Ironically, most MDG 'achievements' are not directly related to the MDGs. If you look at the global scale, for example, China and India have contributed the most toward meeting the MDG targets, although both countries pretty much ignore the MDGs. They have long-established national plans with national targets and a whole set of implementation processes that have neither been influenced by the MDGs, nor by the PRSPs. Both countries refer politely to the MDGs to humour the UN General Assembly, but the MDGs have not achieved any policy traction in either countries.

MDG fans (the optimists) would argue that the MDGs were a historical breakthrough – a global consensus about poverty that brings the world closer to establishing a genuine anti-poverty movement. Pessimists would argue that after the MDGs, international and national policies remained business as usual. Indeed, they would argue that the MDGs were nothing but a confidence trick that allowed the rich to stand on stage and say the world had changed while nothing, in fact, had changed – they still controlled global wealth! From this perspective the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs were a missed opportunity. The Millennium Moment could have been used to transform global power relations, but instead it merely legitimised an unfair world.

If one looks at the United Kingdom (UK), one gets a more positive take on what the MDGs have achieved. We now have a situation in which all three major political parties – including the Conservative Party, which has historically been suspicious of foreign aid – are energetically promoting the UK's role in international development. All three parties are committed to increasing the aid budget and having a cabinet-level ministry for international development. Indeed, David Cameron has used his political capital to win a chair on the High-level Panel (HLP) that is spearheading UN efforts to draft the initial report for the post-2015 development agenda. The reasons for this political consensus can be traced back to the late 1990s when the 'New Labour Party' used discourses on international development to show it had a moral agenda that distinguished it from the Conservative Party (labelled the 'Nasty Party'). Ultimately, New Labour's championing of international development, through the MDGs and alongside the UK's powerful and effective NGOs, has led to public opinion that is surprisingly supportive of foreign aid and of the UK taking a lead role in international development.

By contrast, if you want an example of negative political impacts associated with the MDGs, look to Uganda. When I visited there recently, the Minister of Health said: "If you want to know what is happening in health policy in Uganda, ask Bill Gates and the Global Fund. I am only the Minister of Health." The MDGs, along with other factors, have created a situation in which external donors and public-private partnerships can shape a country's national health policy. Technically, this might be good for health outcomes, but it does not augur well for national ownership of health policy, the evolution of public institutions and democratic accountability.

Hulme's Lessons from the MDGs for the Post-2015 Development Agenda

The MDGs were just too global – it's the national stupid!

If I shed my modesty and ask what I have learned through researching the MDGs, my main concern would be that the MDGs were just too global. There was really no consideration given to how these goals and targets would fit into national processes. As a result, the international input to national plans and budgets was franchised out to the IMF and the World Bank. It was these BWIs that negotiated the PRSPs and MTEFs. This meant that national macroeconomic policy and annual budgeting were not directly connected to the MDGs. Instead of a global agenda influencing these detailed policies and decisions, it was a Washington-based agenda (basically the post-Washington Consensus) that shaped policies in aid-dependent countries. So, if there is a major lesson from the MDGs for the post-2015 development agenda, it is that any new agreement needs to spell out how it will relate to national level planning, policy and budgeting processes. This means the post-2015 development agenda will also have to take national ownership seriously and not bypass it in the way that PRSPs and PRSs did.

How might the post-2015 development agenda accelerate national development (including poverty reduction) and deepen national ownership by strengthening planning and policy processes and making these processes more democratically accountable? PRSPs were lovely documents for aid agencies. However, if they were so important how come they were hardly ever mentioned in national parliaments and assemblies or in political party manifestos in the developing countries? How come they were only related to citizens through donor-guided 'participatory' consultations and not through national political debates? How can the post-2015 development agenda get governments, political parties and national elites to think about inclusive development and take action? My fear is that the present post-2015 discussions are still influenced too much by the perspective of aid agencies. There are signs that this may be changing, with African leaders insisting that growth must be part of any post-2015 agreement, and Latin American governments pushing for a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are more relevant to their growing middle classes than poverty reduction.

The MDGs were a planning tool – do we need something less boring (more visionary)?

The MDGs were framed as a tool for planners operating in a rational world. They assumed a commitment to poverty reduction and did not focus on how to create the conditions for a politically supported assault on poverty at national and international levels. Sakiko Fukuda-Parr and I (Fukuda-Parr and Hulme 2011) have argued that a more effective frame for such exercises might be produced by asking whether we should be thinking about international social norms. The MDGs have not significantly changed the way that most people are thinking and acting on the ground. They did not percolate through to elites and middle classes in the rich world, and more importantly, nor have they had an impact on elites and middle classes in developing countries. If anything, they may have continued to lull the developing country elites into viewing poverty reduction as something that is a specialisation of aid agencies and foreigners. The MDGs have not helped the middle classes in low and middle income countries understand that having the sort of country they want – socially cohesive, physically secure, without beggars and homeless people on the streets – requires that they

actively promote poverty reduction and reduced inequality. The lesson for the post-2015 development agenda is to see if it can be framed in a way that has an impact on the norms of elites and middle classes – and the poor – in both the South and North.

Following this line of thought, I wonder whether one needs to look for simple statements that would capture the attention of the wider public. The best statement I can come up with is “stop babies dying now.” This type of statement grabs people’s attention, is easily memorised, and is hard to contradict. If you ask people of different political persuasions whether they want to stop babies dying now for the cost of a few dollars in medicine or health services, you would get a very strong “yes.” And, while saying “stop babies dying now” sounds simple it actually captures most of the pre-existing MDGs. If you want to reduce preventable infant deaths, then you need to reduce income poverty, reduce hunger (especially of pregnant and lactating women), promote gender empowerment and female access to education, ensure that everyone has a basic education, and improve child and maternal health services – almost all of the existing MDGs.

The MDGs did not interest the big global players – could the post-2015 agenda?

The formulation and implementation of the MDGs was not a significant issue for the major powers in the late 1990s. The US was on the edge of the MDGs process – indeed, it did not accept the MDGs until 2005. The European Union (EU) was ambivalent – the UK and some Northern European nations may have engaged energetically, but the big Mediterranean nations (France, Spain and Italy) yawned and politely nodded their heads. The emerging powers – China, India and Brazil – sat on the sidelines as bilateral and multilateral aid agencies set the agenda. Russia, as far as one can judge, kept quiet and wondered why anyone would be concerned about poor people in other countries. It’s elite were too busy doing corrupt deals to worry about poor people in Russia, so why worry about foreigners?

This time around things could be different. In US, President Obama is not leading the charge – he could lose votes for the Democrats and rally Republican opposition if he showed much interest in the well-being of foreigners. In such a religious country one might hope that religious leaders would identify the post-2015 development agenda as an important moral issue. Unfortunately, most US religious leaders, and many of their followers, seem too obsessed with ‘below the belt’ issues – such as homosexuality, gay marriage, abortion, covering up the Catholic Church’s history of sexual abuse – to think about poor people in poor countries.

Despite the UK trying to be a global cheerleader for the MDGs and the post-2015 agenda, the EU is unlikely to take a lead. It’s new members (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) have diluted it’s interests in international development, and with the Eurozone in crisis, concern about the well-being of non-EU citizens is not a priority.

Members of India’s elite and broadsheet editorials have called for India to take a lead in negotiating the post-2015 development agenda as part of its becoming a major power. But again, domestic political issues (maintaining growth, fierce political party competition, communal insecurity, corruption) seem set to make international development a non-issue. China’s position is unclear, as is much of its international policy. It has a major domestic agenda for reducing inequality. But it is

hard to imagine that the country's leaders have the imagination to see the way in which they could advance their international standing by allying this domestic issue to global inequality and poverty.

Perhaps it will be Brazil that will engage – by forcing a merger between the SDGs it is formulating (through leadership of the UN Rio and Rio+20 initiatives) and the post-2015 development agenda. The links between climate change and poverty creation seem likely to become sharper in the coming years, and Brazil's domestic needs (to care for its burgeoning middle class while reducing the deprivations of its poor) could place the country in a position to take more of a lead.

Southern Voices and Post-2015

What role might Southern voices, and particularly Southern think tanks, play in making the post-2015 development agenda more progressive? One possibility would be to contribute an additional technical perspective and focus on how to improve the content of the final deal – assuming the post-2015 agenda will be a sort of 'MDG 2.0'. How might a Southern voice improve the final list? It might be by focusing on human rights or on reducing inequality. If a Southern voice sought to advance the inequality agenda it could contribute by moving beyond assets and incomes to examine inequalities in health and education, both within nations and between nations.

Alternatively, Southern voices could focus on the process of negotiating the post-2015 agenda. This could mean seeing the final post-2015 development agenda as a side issue – what really matters is the form of negotiations in 2013, 2014 and 2015, and ensuring that they are not led by aid agencies and Northern NGOs that pretend to speak on behalf of the poor in the global South. Could the processes of deliberation change so that poor Southerners can contribute to formulating the new goals? Could the locations and venues change so that the post-2015 agenda is not determined in air-conditioned buildings in capital cities but somewhere closer to where the poor live? Could we commence some of the structural changes that Professor Sobhan has talked about (see Sobhan 2013 for more details) by looking at the opportunities we have to do things differently now?

Epilogue – Radical Thoughts

The present efforts to formulate the post-2015 development agenda mirror much of what went on before the MDGs. UN committees and national leaders are debating what the priorities are, NGOs are lobbying for their pet causes, and academics are searching out new ways of torturing data to identify 'what works.' However, when I look back to the late 1990s, I have a radical thought: in many ways the World Trade Organization (WTO) riot in Seattle changed things more than any discussions at the UN. When the politically powerful saw that the inequality being created by globalisation might bring people out on the streets, the Western world took notice.

Could it be that the process of negotiating the post-2015 agenda is a highly effective way to tie up civil society's time and energy and discourage social mobilisation and protest? Could the main lesson to draw from the experience with the MDGs be that seeking a consensus on global development goals means agreeing to 'business as usual'? Perhaps it is time to take the gloves off and start protesting about poverty and inequality.

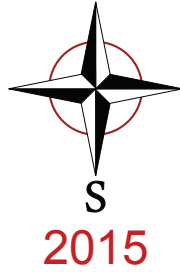
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