

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

After 2015: Beyond the Millennium
Development Goals

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By:
Dr. Clive Gabay

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School of Social Sciences

Centro de Estudios Internacionales (International Studies Center) – CEI

Carrera 1 No. 18A – 12, Edificio Roberto Franco, Tercer piso

Phone 3394949, ext. 2887, 5509

contactocei@uniandes.edu.co

<http://cei.uniandes.edu.co/>

Editors

Ángela Iranzo Dosdad

Carolina Santacruz Bravo

Marcela María Villa Escobar

María Lucía Osorno Martínez

Copyediting

Carol O’Flinn

Design

Víctor Leonel Gómez

Layout

Santiago Barreto Rueda

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After 2015: Beyond the Millennium Development Goals

By:

Dr. Clive Gabay

Graduated in Politics from the University of Leicester and then went on to study for a Masters degree in Imperialism and Post-Colonial Societies at Birkbeck College, UoL, simultaneously working as a researcher for the UK Department for International Development. Following this he returned to do a PhD at the Open University, and in 2010 joined the School of Politics and International Relations at QMUL. In 2011 and 2012 he won British International Studies Association Conference Awards, the first of which funded a conference on liberal state-building in Africa, the second on protest in Africa.

Introduction

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have been a source of debate since their adoption by the United Nations (UN) family at the beginning of the century. There are eight goals each with a subset of more specific targets. The goals are as follows:

1. To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. To achieve universal primary education
3. To promote gender equality and empower women
4. To reduce child mortality
5. To improve maternal health
6. To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
7. To ensure environmental sustainability
8. To develop a global partnership for development

It is commonly understood that the MDGs were originated by the UN General Assembly in 2000, but in fact they were not. What the General Assembly released was something called the Millennium Declaration, a bold document which foregrounded language of rights and justice, and called for the cancelling of all bilateral debt and the creation of a fair and just international trading system (UN, 2000). As can be seen from the list above, none of these demands appear in the goals. Indeed, whilst every UN member state signed up to the Millennium Declaration, the goals themselves were drawn up by a committee of the large multilateral and Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) donors. Inspired by the declaration but actually based on a set of targets drawn together by the OECD Development



Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) in the 1990s, the resulting MDGs were a mixture of the lofty rights-based development rhetoric in the declaration and the more technocratic and neo-liberal language of resource-management which had dominated many western countries in the 1990s (Hulme, 2007).

So whilst the declaration provided a language of rights and justice, it was the goals themselves which provided a framework for international development programming over the following decade and a half, and thus it is to the goals we must turn in order to understand the limitations of the framework which has dominated international development thinking and practice over the past 14 years. For indeed; the MDG paradigm has been limited, and many of its failings have been both exogenous and endogenous. The dossier will therefore explore three main critiques of the MDGs:

- 1) That they have been too universal in scope, obscuring local and national developmental dynamics;
- 2) That they have been overly obsessed with technocratic and quantitative approaches to development;
- 3) That they have been solely focussed on the Global South, ignoring developmental issues and responsibilities in the Global North.

The dossier will then finally turn to an analysis of current debates on what will follow the MDGs in 2015. The United Nations High Level Panel was convened in 2013 with this precise aim in mind, and its report is revealing for as much as what is being left out of many contemporary debates and what is being included. There has also been the concurrent Rio+20 processes; which are seeking to marry conventional development priorities with a sustainable development agenda. The dossier will consider the implications of both these processes for a post-2015 agenda, and

conclude with an analysis of where we are likely to be in a year's time, at the launch of the September 2015 special UN summit on the post MDG agenda.

Analysis

Then Secretary General of the United Nations Kofi Annan referred to the MDGs as a 'seminal event' in the history of the UN (Grieg, Hulme and Turner, 2007: 131), and for those concerned with poverty and development, the MDGs are indeed '...here, there and everywhere' (Saith, 2006: 1167). For instance, every OECD-DAC country has adopted the goals as their development aid spending framework, whilst the World Bank's engagement with developing countries, through its poverty reduction strategy (PRS) process, is similarly framed by the MDGs. Major civil society networks have adopted the goals to coalesce around in pressuring their own governments and multilateral institutions to meet development pledges (Gabay, 2011). Lastly, the MDGs have become ubiquitous across donor agencies, many of whom have major sections of their websites¹ and teams of policy experts and advocates dedicated to the goals.

A huge effort has been made to meet the various goals. In pure financial terms it is impossible to put a figure on it, as the resources required to meet the goals have been drawn from a multitude of levels and organisations (i.e. governments, multilateral organisations, private foundations, multi-national corporations, NGOs and charities, etc.). To get an idea though, in 2001 the UN suggested that an extra \$61bn would be required on top of what was then currently being given in aid. That figure has only risen since, with the

1 For example: the World Bank (www.worldbank.org/mdgs); UK Government (www.dfid.gov.uk/mdg/); US Government (www.usaid.gov/our_work/mdg/); Oxfam (http://www.oxfam.org.uk/get_involved/campaign/health_and_education/mdgs.html); ActionAid (www.actionaid.org.uk/899/millennium_development_goals.html)

OECD suggesting in 2011 that the figure was actually more like \$120bn (OECD, 2011). And yet, with all the resources, and all the efforts, the results have been decidedly mixed. Whilst there have been successes, such as in kick-starting efforts in global health and in increasing primary education enrolment rates, the headline achievements are significantly undermined by the disaggregated data. So for instance, the target of MDG 1, which is to eradicate 50% of extreme poverty by 2015, has, at a headline level been achieved. Extreme poverty is calculated by the World Bank to be the equivalent of living on \$1.25 a day (i.e. the amount that \$1.25 would buy you in the United States, in 2005). However, if we take into account the huge rises in food prices which we have witnessed in recent years then this achievement becomes less substantial. Headline achievements have also been undermined by huge disparities between social groups. For instance, despite Asia appearing to be on track to meet most of the goals at an aggregate level, in Nepal, the overall decline in poverty between 1995 and 2003 varied from 46 per cent for the upper caste Brahman/Chhetri groups, to 10 per cent for Janajatis living in the hills and 6 per cent for Muslims. In Vietnam, about 45 per cent of ethnic minorities have not completed any education as compared with 22 per cent for Kinh/Chinese. Similarly, a poor indigenous woman aged 17-22 in Guatemala has 1.2 years of education compared with a national average of almost six years, and in Nigeria, only 4 per cent of women in the north east received care from a doctor compared with 52 per cent of women in the south west (IDS, 2010).

This brings us to the first main critique of the whole MDG exercise; that they have been too global in scope, and fail to take account of regional, national and local differences. Even though defenders of the goals argue that they are merely aspirational, and that they were never designed to be a set of top-down directives, it is nonetheless the case that they have

been adopted so universally by every main developmental agency that they have inevitably become a universal programme for development at national level. Donors have dedicated funds and programmes², and national governments have ring-fenced budgets, in order to meet the MDGs. Civil society organisations have recruited staff, and even been created, in order to meet the MDGs³. It is impossible then to suggest that the goals have acted simply as a loose framework when so many political actors have so much invested in at least appearing to be progressing towards the goals, especially in those countries which would benefit most from meeting them, such as many sub-Saharan African countries.

Being universal in scope would necessarily be problematic if the goals spoke to universal developmental problems. However, the goals do not do this, and for many represent a diminished, depoliticised version of development. This is because they are overly technocratic, focusing on measurable targets rather than hard to measure aspects of development such as gender or racial equality, or unequal development between the Global North and the Global South. Being technocratic they intrinsically make weak and poor national states responsible for their own development, rather than the political structures of the international market economy which create many of the poverty conditions these countries experience (Harrison, 2010; Amin, 2006). From a gender perspective the MDGs were labelled as “Major Distracting Gimmicks” by the feminist scholar Peggy Antrobus (Antrobus, 2005). To illustrate this point, the indicators of success listed under Goal number 3, on gender equality and the empowerment of women, are as follows: (1) Ratios of girls

2 The World Bank’s MDG website (<http://www.worldbank.org/mdgs/>) leads with “The World Bank is committed to helping achieve the MDGs because, simply put, these goals are our goals”

3 See for instance, the Global Call to Action against Poverty (www.whiteband.org)



to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education; (2) Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector; (3) Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament. Whilst in and of themselves laudable, these indicators do not touch on issues of gender-based violence, rape, domestic abuse or indeed, class. For instance, one might ask whether it matters if 50% of national parliaments are made up of women if most of those women are barristers or economists. From this perspective then the MDGs represent the culmination of a neo-liberal logic which ties developing countries into a hegemonic project of market-led development. This therefore furthers ‘...some of the most dramatic and explosive dimensions of the era of market liberalization and neoliberal globalization — that of spectacularly rising inequalities that are as visible as the worsening forms of social and service exclusion in large parts of the third world’ (Saith, 2006: 1185).

This relates to the third main critique about the MDGs, that they are in essence a plan originated by the Global north for the Global South, with little if any input from the latter. This explains why the only obligations on the Global North are contained in Goal 8 (Creating a Global Partnership for development) and are so vague or based on processes which are hard so to measure that they have been effectively meaningless. There are two problems with this. Firstly, if poverty is produced by underlying global structures, ranging from food dumping and historic carbon emissions to an inequitable global trading system, then solving poverty must surely involve changes in the Global North. Secondly, an overriding focus on poverty in the Global South means that the MDGs are not really about global development, but development in the Global South. This overlooks pockets of extreme poverty and wide scale inequality in the Global North, as well as growing health problems such as obesity and related chronic diseases.

So we can see that the MDGs have been beset by problems from the very beginning, which have made their realisation almost impossible. Put simply, one might wonder how you can eliminate extreme poverty by focussing solely on public service delivery, and ignoring the complete restructuring of the global land economy, providing access to land to the peasantry who still make up a very large proportion of the populations of many developing countries (for a critique along this line see Cammack, 2004). And yet access to land is mentioned nowhere in the MDGs, perhaps revealing of some of the corporate interests taken into account during the drafting of the goals. The goals were therefore beset by three main problems:

- 1) The MDGs were in a sense over-ambitious, creating global goals for discrete regional, national and local developmental problems;
- 2) They weren’t ambitious enough, resulting in a largely neoliberal rendition of development;
- 3) They were not global development goals, but merely the Global North’s goals for the Global South.

It is this final problem which probably encapsulates the others. For how can we have a global development agreement which takes account of local differentiation, applies to all equally and addresses the truly political nature of contemporary development issues without adequate consultation of those most affected by development ‘solutions’ I.e. people living in poverty? It is to the post-2015 consultation efforts that this dossier will now turn its attention.

The current debates

At first glance, there are an overwhelming number of consultation exercises being carried out to consult ‘the public’ on the post-2015 agenda, in marked difference to the way in which the MDGs were conceived behind closed commit-

tee-room doors. This would appear to suggest that the post-2015 process may be more capable of incorporating heterodox and perhaps more radical perspectives than its equivalent in the years leading up to 2000/2001. It is therefore worth reflecting on these exercises to outline their contours and objectives.

At the ‘top’ level was the United Nations High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (HLP). Appointed by the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, and mandated to report in the second quarter of 2013, the HLP had been tasked with producing a report “...regarding the vision and shape of a Post-2015 development agenda”, taking into account the Rio+20 Outcome Document (UN, 2012). The HLP conducted a number of regional consultations which saw it travel to New York, London and Monrovia, with a final stop in Bali in March 2013. The panel itself was supposed to include “...representatives of governments, the private sector, academia, civil society and youth” (Ibid), in an attempt to produce a set of recommendations to the Secretary General which reflects the developmental challenges of the 21st Century. However, problems with the HLP emerge when we judge it by its own definition of civil society. For whilst private sector involvement had been secured with the membership on the panel of Paul Polman, Chief Executive Officer of Unilever (and former Chief Financial Officer of Nestle), civil society, and indeed the youth component of this sector are far harder to pin down. Indeed, the civil society component was made up of long time advocates such as Graca Machel and Queen Rania of Jordan. But one wonders at the exclusion of organisations working directly with people living in poverty, and the inclusion of a large number of technocrats and neoliberal ideologues, not the least in the form of HLP co-chair Prime Minister David Cameron, who before it was even announced that he would be asked to fulfil this role proclaimed his be-

lief (and perhaps pre-judged the outcomes) that any new development agenda should be predicated on the ideals of the small state and economic growth axis (Ford, 2013).

Another problem that emerged with the HLP was the sheer speed with which it took place, and thus the circumscribed time in which civil society organisations could participate. Reports from the London HLP meeting spoke of high levels of frustration from civil society organisations with the fact that they were given a total of roughly two hours to make their varied cases and inputs. It is important to stress here that of course the civil society case will be incredibly varied. Civil society organisations do not speak with a single voice, and civil societies in different countries have engaged very unevenly with the MDG process, from full on acceptance to outright rejection (Gabay, 2012). This is to say nothing of the more general divisions which appear within transnational campaign and message building along international and national/local lines (Gabay, 2012a: 94), Southern and Northern (Yanacopulos, 2009), urban and rural (Kapur, 2002) professional and communal (Freizer, 2005), and so on.

A further issue was one of access and conformity. The Bali meeting received applications for funded places from 433 civil society organisations from around the world. Only 50 of these organisations were granted fully funded places (covering air travel, accommodation, etc.). Of course limited resources played their role, but regardless of the benign nature of these kinds of exclusions, they are exclusions nonetheless. In addition, consultative exercises such as these have been noted to reduce the complexity and contradictions of civil society to an easily assimilated and translatable whole to the exclusion of more radical or indigenous forms of knowledge. This is achieved through language barriers, or the ways in which certain types of communication are ruled as being out of order, particularly those which utilise more emotive



or passionate forms of expression (Tucker, 2011), something which perhaps should not be lacking from discussions of poverty. Indeed, the HLP meetings were constructed around a number of pre-ordained ‘framing questions’⁴. The rather narrow and organised nature of the HLP process is in marked distinction to the rounds of summits and meetings which took place in the 1990s, in the lead up to the Millennium Declaration, where members of concerned social movements would infiltrate and dominate proceedings unannounced in a cacophony of languages to push various points up the agenda.

What then of the other processes underway which have tried to articulate a public set of demands for the post-2015 agenda? As I stated at the beginning of this section, there are a number of seemingly overlapping exercises underway, and so it is important to unpick them for an understanding of how inclusive the consultation process has been.

The ‘World We Want’ campaign is an exhaustive attempt to catalogue local, national and thematic perspectives on a post-2015 agenda. Local consultations are taking place in many countries which are then being rolled up into national consultations which in turn will be rolled up into a final report to be delivered to the UN Secretary General in 2015. Also feeding into this report will be the thematic discussions, which are tackling issues including inequalities, education, health, governance and so on. The thematic discussions are conducted via online forums and physical international consultations. Each of the thematic sections on the World we Want website (www.worldwewant2015.org) contains several pages of online discussions, opportunities to participate, and then links to a number of documents relating to inputs and outcomes of the physical consultations, which themselves are also open to

online participation through tweets and so on. Such technology is of course in and of itself exclusionary, even whilst at the same time it opens up opportunities for participation to individuals and groups who may not have had the chance previously. This is because it remains the case that millions of people around the world lack access to electricity, let alone the high-speed broadband required to underpin many social networking technologies and websites.

Nonetheless, it is worth noting the inequalities thematic sections, not least because inequality in many of its forms was a victim of the original MDGs first time around (Saith, 2006). This time around, the World we Want inequalities debate has been marked by a high degree of structural and in some case quite radical analyses of political economy (see for instance: *The World We Want*, 2013: 2)

The World We Want campaign is not a civil society-run campaign. It is a UN campaign, and the consultations are not limited to civil society organisations or less formalised groups. For instance, the inequalities face-to-face consultation was led by UNICEF and UN Women, with support from the Governments of Denmark and Ghana. As Nora Mckee has shown (2009), parts of the UN system have been very good at engaging with and providing effective spaces for more radical components of civil society, in ways in which the HLP process did not do. It is therefore not particularly productive to treat the UN system as a homogeneous or monolithic whole. Nonetheless, if we travel through some of the local and national consultation processes we find that ‘civil society’ is equally heterogeneous, and even more so a site for contestation between competing visions of the social good, a fact which becomes clearer when we see how the World We Want consultations have become in some cases captured by particular interpretations or groups. For instance, in India the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)

4 These can be found here: http://www.un.org/sg/management/pdf/HLP_Framing_Questions.pdf (accessed on 22/03/2013)

is the civil society partner to the UN coordinating agencies. And so it is that one finds references to venture capital as being the key to the growth of sustainable jobs and employment⁵. The consultation from which this is drawn is but one of tens in India; and hundreds across the world, but it does illustrate the ambiguities and inconsistencies of the UN civil society engagement process. This may in part be a product of the UN ownership of the campaign, and the imperative of the UN to work with as broad an array of organisations and interests as possible.

Another consultation effort being mounted by the UN is the My World (MW2015) survey (www.myworld2015.org). Coordinated by the UN Development Programme, UN Millennium Campaign, the UK Overseas Development Institute and the World Wide Web Foundation, MW2015 is an online survey which provides web visitors with a list of 16 options from which they are asked to prioritise 6. Rather than duplicating the World We Want process, MW2015 is conceived of as being a component of the former process, "...a single piece capturing citizens' voices to enrich this global conversation" (www.myworld2015.org). The survey aims to reach beyond the NGOs and CSOs of the World We Want process, by being a more generally and publically accessible format. As well as launching online, the survey is also accessible via SMS, and in hard copy format, both of which are avenues which are being publicised by local partnering NGOs and CSOs. In this way MW2015 seeks to overcome some of the barriers to participation which are structurally embedded in the World We Want process. It should be noted however that as of July 18th 2014 (15 months after it was launched) only 2.7million people around the world had completed the survey.

Like the HLP however, the MW2015 survey is a relatively narrow affair. Whilst 16 issues are listed on the survey site, participants may only select 6, whilst key issues in many parts of the world, such as land rights, private sector-led corruption, or non-employment (i.e. non-wage labour) based productivity are all excluded. These issues lie at the root of some of the most explosive yet under-reported conflicts around the world today, and are of course deeply political, reflecting the structural inequalities which pervade the current global economy. Whilst the survey does provide for an 'add your own' option, the likelihood is that without sustained global campaigning on some of these issues the other 16 options will dominate. Furthermore, all 16 options deal with ends, rather than means. For example, and in direct reference to some of the exclusions listed above, the survey has the following to say when illustrating what it means under the option of "Protecting Forests, Rivers and Oceans":

"This means that natural resources should be looked after, because people depend on them for food, fuel and other resources. Governments should agree on plans to reduce pollution in oceans and rivers, plant new forests and preserve existing ones, and move towards sustainable agriculture and food systems. Global agreements should protect biodiversity and fragile ecosystems" (<http://www.myworld2015.org/>)

Having global agreements and pollution reduction plans can become slightly meaningless when natural resource degradation has become so intertwined with corporate land acquisition and the export oriented growth strategies foisted on many developing countries. Of course it cannot be the case that one survey exercise can incorporate all of these issues, particularly when related to the political economy of 'value chains' and the like, and indeed the very nature of a closed survey is to be exclusive and reductive, yet MW2015 represents the main UN exercise by which the very people subject to global development tar-

⁵ See <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/node/306453> (accessed on 13/03/2013) for the Jammu and Kashmir World We Want consultation report

gets (beyond the NGOs, CSOs and CBOs of the World We Want process) are being consulted. All in all then one might conclude that this is a rather paltry affair designed to legitimise the terms of debate already set out by the HLP. In any case we are once again confronted with a highly technological and professionalised process which loses multiplicity and the political for what it gains in efficiency.

There are other monitoring and consultation initiatives⁶, although the three mentioned above are the core processes, and more importantly perhaps complement each other in terms of feeding into the HLP process, and beyond. Having ascertained the patchy nature of the consultative process for any post-2015 agreement, it is now important to look at how such an agreement is coming together, but looking at the two main tracks which will feed into the final debates at the United Nations 2015 summit. These are the aforementioned HLP process, and the Rio +20 sustainable development goals process.

What next?

Since 2012 efforts to negotiate a post-2015 agenda have taken on new energy, with discussions centring on proposals for a new set of Global Development Goals (GDGs) or Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These proposals have the potential to reformulate the vision and scope of development as an idea, and how the notion of human progress is codified and enacted in the international community. This final section draws attention to two precarious yet potentially radical challenges they present to existing development discourse, one related to its global scope, another to its model of resource consumption.

6 These include the Post 2015 website (www.post2015.org) a clearing house for position papers, blogs etc., coordinated by the UK Overseas Development Institute, and Beyond 2015 (www.beyond2015.org), a civil society led campaign dedicated to monitoring the process, rather than the content of the post 2015 debate.

Global development goals

The MDGs were intended to be global goals. However, they ended up primarily framing development in terms of the reduction of extreme poverty in absolute terms (Fukuda-Parr and Hulme, 2011). By omitting targets on inequality or relative poverty (or a host of other human development indicators) the MDGs had little apparent relevance to countries in Europe, North America, Japan or Australasia. Only one goal really applied to the so-called ‘developed’ nations (MDG8, the goal calling for the establishment of a ‘global compact’) and that was rather vague and un-specific, with no measurable or time-bound targets (Boltz et al, 2013). The global focus of the MDGs quickly became targets for certain parts of the world, and they have been commonly interpreted in terms of targets for individual regions and countries (Easterly, 2009: 34). As such the MDG frame of reference has been accused of ‘not provid[ing] a global template, merely “our” agenda for “them”’ (Saith, 2006: 1184).

Some of the proposals for GDGs, in contrast, have sought to recapture the genuinely global scope of the original Millennium Declaration. A target for reducing income inequality would present a greater political, social and economic challenge for countries like the USA and the UK than it would for Ethiopia or Pakistan, for example (Bello, 2013: 99). Targets for other social indicators – such as violent crime or obesity rates – would also apply to the ‘developed’ countries as well as the ‘developing’ world, and might do more to render these categories redundant than decades of academic critique⁷. As Saith observes, the existing approach of the MDGs

7 For further details on the content of some of these discussions see the ‘topics’ listed on the World We Want website (<http://www.worldwewant2015.org/topics>). The World We Want is a jointly organised UN-civil society initiative to consult a broad range of civil society voices on the post-2015 development framework.

‘tends to ghettoize the problem of development and locates it firmly in the third world — as if development is fundamentally and exclusively an issue of absolute levels of living. Whatever happened to poverty and deprivation in the advanced economies? Are they to be silenced?’ (Saith, 2006: 1184). In contrast, genuinely global development goals might start to fundamentally challenge the way in which development ‘reproduces endlessly the separation between reformers and those to be reformed’ (Escobar, 1995: 53-4).

The final report of the High Level Panel stressed that the post-2015 goals should be universal in nature. Many of their illustrative targets applied to developed as well as developing countries. They proposed targets on reducing post-harvest food waste (5e), doubling the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix (7a), eliminating harmful subsidies in agriculture and fossil fuels (12a and 7d), and promoting sustainable consumption and production (9a and 9b). In some ways, however, the report reaffirmed the binary division between developed and developing, for example by calling on ‘developed countries to fulfil their side of the bargain’, by making ‘concrete efforts towards the target of 0.7% of gross national product (GNP) as official development assistance to developing countries’ (UN, 2013: executive summary, and target 12d). This tension is symptomatic of much of the broader debate, and confirms that the degree to which the GDGs will be genuinely global is hanging in the balance.

Sustainable development goals (SDGs)

The second radical challenge concerns the question of the environmental sustainability of existing patterns of resource consumption in mainstream development. In the build-up to the Rio+20 conference in 2012, a proposal from the Governments of Colombia and Guatemala suggested the development of a suite of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

would enable the international community to ‘prioritize those issues which are the most indicative of current needs to balance socio-economic growth with responsible environmental stewardship’⁸. Such a suite would be explicitly universal in application (in contrast to the MDGs), and would include renewable energy targets and ‘changing consumption patterns’⁹. Proposals for reforming agricultural subsidies, reductions in food waste, equitable intellectual property rights, and the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity have been advanced by delegates from Brazil, India, Ghana and elsewhere (Leone et al, 2013b: 4). A truly ‘green economy’ – promoted at Rio+20 as one of the important tools available for achieving sustainable development – would present significant challenges to existing models of development as growth, fuelled by the ever-more intensive extraction of natural resources (Melamedd and Ladd, 2013).

The final report of the High Level Panel emphasised the importance of environmental sustainability to the achievement of any new development goals. Identifying five ‘big, transformative shifts’ which will lie behind the post-2015 development agenda, the second of these proposes to ‘put sustainable development at the core’ (UN, 2013). They propose goals on (v) ensuring food security and good nutrition; (vi) achieving universal access to water and sanitation; (vii) securing sustainable energy; and (ix) managing natural resource assets sustainably (UN, 2013: chapter 3). Climate change is repeatedly stressed as the ‘one trend... which will determine whether or not we can deliver on our ambitions’ (UN, 2013: executive summary).

8 <http://www.uncsd2012.org/content/documents/colombiasdgs.pdf> (accessed 13 May 2013).

9 <http://www.uncsd2012.org/content/documents/colombiasdgs.pdf> (accessed 13 May 2013).



As with the rhetoric surrounding the Millennium Declaration in 2000, there has been no shortage of ambitious and radical proposals for bringing together the GDG and SDG agenda. The European Commission released its proposal for global development goals in February 2013, *A Decent Life for All: Ending poverty and giving the world a sustainable future*, which made the case for addressing environmental sustainability simultaneously with eliminating poverty, and producing 'a limited set of goals that address quantitative and qualitative targets, and apply to all countries while taking into account different national capacities and levels of development'.¹⁰ Jeffrey Sachs, a long-standing champion of the MDG approach, proposed four pillars for the post-2015 goals: to end poverty in all its forms; ensure social inclusion; address the environmental agenda, including biodiversity, climate change and oceans; and governance to support the first three goals. At an ODI seminar, in response to a question on the role of developed countries, Sachs 'called for goals that apply to all countries, noting that even rich countries face sustainable development challenges and experience inequality'¹¹. Whether they are termed GDGs or SDGs, therefore, there seems to be some degree of consensus emerging that the post-2015 development architecture should be structured around a single set of goals which will impose meaningful targets on all countries, and which will work to transition countries onto more sustainable paths of resource consumption.

Conclusion

The question this final discussion poses is whether the content of such a global set of targets will drive different forms of political and economic arrangements which will truly

transform the lives of those living in poverty for the better. If, as seems likely, new global goals simply focus in on economic growth, then this will in the long-run counteract any sustainable components of a post-2015 agenda. What can certainly be said is that in terms of composition, any new set of goals will be driven by many of the same constituencies which drove the initial MDGs. So whilst some of these actors, particularly governments, may have evolved their thinking about development in the intervening period, if we get a post-2015 agreement it is still very likely to be as top-down as the MDGs. The 'if' is an important caveat here though, for the past 15 years have borne witness to a general fatigue with large development agendas in the Global North, reinforced by a financial and cost of living crisis which has drained public support for such perceived grand initiatives. Furthermore, any realisation of the BRICS bank (Pilling, 2014) may further undermine support for a UN-driven process in the Global South, as governments realise they have the option to pursue discrete developmental policies without what many see as onerous 'good governance' conditions imposed by the World Bank and other OECD donors. With only a year to go until the 2015 UN summit, it is still therefore tremendously unclear what, if anything will emerge to replace the current MDG framework.

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