

2014. What Have the MDGs Accomplished and What Are the Prospects for the World's greatest promise to end poverty?

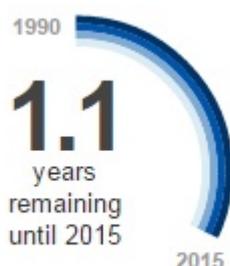
A retrospect for the Millennium Development Goals. What has been done so far?

(by Alexandra Sabou)

Two cross-cutting topics in the field of international development concern both the governmental and the non-governmental sector and the academia: firstly, the evaluation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) due to expire at the end of 2015 and secondly, the formulation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the post-2015 agenda designed to guide our efforts until 2030. For more than a decade already, the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have galvanized opinions and raised criticisms around the methods of improving our living conditions and ending poverty in the world. Following [the 2000 Millennium Declaration](#) put forward by the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, the MDGs were supposed to represent the crafted framework for promoting normative transformation in the global society. It is worth to mention that since their very beginning, they were meant to express ends for development, not a 'one-size-fits-all' recipe to solve the humankind problems put down on paper and unanimously recognized by all the UN members (Vandermoortele 2012, 8) . They have set a global call for improvement in order to halve extreme poverty (MDG 1), reduce child and maternal mortality (MDG 4, MDG 5) , combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (MDG 6), promote

gender equality (MDG 3), environmental sustainability (MDG 7) and universal primary education (MDG 2). Beneath the eight goals stay several quantitative targets and many dozen indicators that are supposed to orient the actions and reactions of all the actors involved in the process. However, despite the fact that the eight cartoons or drawings that illustrate our prospects seem to universalize the targets, in some cases it is still very hard to set the bar too high and expect for quick and sustainable results.

The goals are about to expire on December 31, 2015 and the debate on what should come next is extremely provocative and effervescent at the global scale. Prior to come up with new recommendations for the post-2015 agenda, the world community should evaluate what has already been done.



Over the years, the international community has embraced several goals and campaigns aimed to reach several development goals, variously defined. For example, the UN campaigns '*Education for All*' (1978) and '*Health for All*' (1990) aimed to achieve universal primary education and access to healthcare by 2000 (McGillivray 2008, 1). Another very similar set of objectives were the *International Development Goals* (IDGs) set by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) within OECD, endorsed by the World Bank, IMF and UN in June 2000. However, the major difference between these campaigns aiming to set global objectives and the MDGs stays in the already worldwide recognized interdependent character of the latter. The MDGs were not set as a monolithic policy with a definite budget and a specific mapping out of responsibilities. Instead, they were supposed to function as a partnership between developed and developing countries, as it

was stated in the declaration adopted by the General Assembly during the Millennium Summit held in New-York on 6-8 September 2000: “Only through broad and sustained efforts to create a shared future based upon our common humanity in all its diversity, can globalization be made fully inclusive and equitable” (UN General Assembly 2001). The Declaration itself is much broader than the eight MDGs and contains *inter alia* other commitments to key principles and values (i.e. freedom, tolerance, equality, solidarity, respect for nature, etc.) that should intrinsically go together with the goals to achieve wellbeing outcomes in all developing countries.

They were all reiterated on the ‘*Road Map Towards the Implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration*’ (UN General Assembly 2001) presented by Kofi Annan:



In practical terms, the MDGs have been officially launched as a mutually agreed-on partnership between developed and developing countries in March 2002, during the UN International Conference on Financing for Development held in Monterrey, Mexico, where world leaders highlighted the crucial importance of the ODA (the Official Development Assistance set at 0.70 percent of Gross National Income (GNI) of developed countries, compared to an average of 0.22 percent of GNI given to aid in 2000). Used wisely, aid is crucial if it is transferred to real investments (schools, hospitals, infrastructure, sanitation, etc.); however, the aid target of 0.7 percent was unlikely to be achieved considering the economic crisis affecting developed countries as well and the

amount of debt forgiveness and humanitarian aid that are also part of the donor efforts. According to the latest reports (United Nation, The MDGs reports from [2013](#), [2014](#)), in 2013 the ODA represented 0.3 percent of developed countries' GNI and the US, the UK, Germany, France and Japan were the largest donors. Only Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Luxembourg managed to exceed the ODA target of 0.7 percent of their GNI. Nonetheless, despite several critiques that address the architecture of the ODA and the real costs and commitments to the MDGs, the 'little' that has been done gives hope or, at least, provides us with analysis and substantial lessons for the new framework that is about to be established starting with 2016.

What has been done so far?

(Sources: *The MDGs Report*, (United Nations 2014) and *The Global Monitoring Report 2014/2015: Ending Poverty and Sharing Prosperity* (World Bank 2014.).

MDGs	Current status																					
MDG1 – eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	<p>Between 1990 and 2011, the share of people who live with less than one dollar/ day has been halved, reaching 1 billion in 2011. However, progress in reducing undernourishment and poverty remains uneven across regions and countries. Between 2011 and 2013, one in eight people in the world were estimated to have been suffering from hunger. The majority come from Sub-Saharan and South-Asian countries where poverty is prevalent:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Country</th> <th>1990</th> <th>2005</th> <th>2011</th> <th>2015</th> <th>2020</th> <th>2030</th> <th>South Asia (%)</th> <th>53.2</th> <th>39.3</th> <th>24.5</th> <th>18.1</th> <th>13.8</th> <th>2.1</th> <th>Sub-Saharan Countries (%)</th> <th>56.6</th> <th>52.8</th> <th>46.8</th> <th>40.9</th> <th>34.2</th> <th>23.6</th> </tr> </thead> </table> <p>(Source: Global Monitoring Report 2014/2015: Ending Poverty and Sharing Prosperity, The World Bank (2014), p. 19)</p> <p>According to the World Bank, around 14.5 percent of the world's population remained in extreme poverty. In the 1990s, East Asia had the greatest poverty rate; nowadays, Sub-Saharan countries and South Asia face the highest poverty rates. Prospects of reducing global poverty to below to 3 percent by 2030 are not optimistic for several countries from these areas.</p> <p>Nowadays, the world's extreme poor are concentrated in 5 countries, mainly in China, India, Bangladesh, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo. (The Global Monitoring Report 2014, p.2)</p> <p>Prospects for 2030 don't look good for 6 countries which, according to the World Bank will continue to face poverty rates above 30 percent: Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Madagascar, Malawi and Zambia (The Global Monitoring Report 2014, p.21).</p>	Country	1990	2005	2011	2015	2020	2030	South Asia (%)	53.2	39.3	24.5	18.1	13.8	2.1	Sub-Saharan Countries (%)	56.6	52.8	46.8	40.9	34.2	23.6
	Country	1990	2005	2011	2015	2020	2030	South Asia (%)	53.2	39.3	24.5	18.1	13.8	2.1	Sub-Saharan Countries (%)	56.6	52.8	46.8	40.9	34.2	23.6	
MDG2 – universal primary education	<p>Despite important progress that has been made in the last couple of years, more than 700 million adults and 125 youth worldwide do not have basic reading, writing and numeracy skills. (The Millennium Development Goals Report 2014, United Nations, 2014, p.16) In the last decade, the net enrolment rate raised to an average of 80 percent. Moreover, the majority of out-of-school primary school aged children live in areas affected by conflicts: 20 percent in Southern Asia and 44 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa. In these areas, girls face numerous problems entering and finishing primary school. (The Millennium Development Goals Report 2014, United Nations, 2014, pp.17-20). Moreover, finishing primary education is not at all sufficient to escape poverty and the vulnerability trap. In addition to this, some cultural factors play an important role in traditional societies. Religion and culture involve more research in order to give us the tools to advocate for education solutions or other investments.</p>																					

<p>MDG3 – Gender equality and women empowerment</p>	<p>All gender related disparities should be eliminated from all forms of education by 2015. The Gender Parity Index (GPI, which corresponds to the girls gross enrolment ratio divided by the gross enrolment of boys) should correspond to 0,97-1,03%. Despite the fact that Northern Africa made important progress in raising the GPI from 0,82 to 0,96%, girls face several disadvantages comparing to same aged boys. It is confirmed that larger gender related disparities are met in secondary education than in primary. (The Millennium Development Goals Report 2014, United Nations, 2014, p.20)Despite the fact that the gender gap in education has been met, disparities in the labor market are still persistent. The World Bank (data from 2010-2012) shows that the time related unemployment rate between men and women stays higher in Sub-Saharan countries (12,6 to 15,8 percent), Northern Africa (3,7 to 17,5%) and Southern Asia (12,0 to 20,6%).Moreover, between 2000 and 2013 women’s political participation increases and the proportion of women holding parliamentary seats in 2013 increased consistently (from 13 to 23% in Sub-Saharan countries, from 3 to 24% in Northern Africa). Rwanda has the greatest women representation in parliament (56%), North Africa and the Middle East are still reluctant to female participation in public life. (The Millennium Development Goals Report 2014, United Nations, 2014, p.23)</p>
<p>MDG4 – reducing child mortality rate</p>	<p>According to the UN Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality estimations, between 1990 and 2012, the child mortality rate has been halved, being reduced to an average of 48 deaths per 1000 live births. In addition to this, the rate of under-five deaths decreased from 12,6m in 1990 to 6,6m in 2012. South Asia and Sub Saharan countries face major problems in reducing infant and under-five children mortality. (The Millennium Development Goals Report 2014, United Nations, 2014, p.26)The majority of the 6,6m deaths are due to infectious diseases (see MDG6), (such as malaria, measles, diarrhea and pneumonia), under- nutrition, weak-immunity systems and the lack of appropriate health services. (The Global Monitoring Report 2014, pp.168-169)</p>
<p>MDG5 – reducing maternal mortality</p>	<p>According to the UN Maternal Mortality Inter-Agency Group, the global maternal mortality ratio has been reduced by 45 percent. However, this doesn’t meet the MDG5 target to reduce maternal mortality by 75 percent. (The Global Monitoring Report 2014, p.170)More than 60 percent of maternal deaths have occurred in Sub-Saharan countries due to poor health infrastructure and lack of antenatal services, lack of sexual education, gender-based violence, under-nourishment, etc.Sierra Leone has the highest maternal mortality rate (1,100 maternal deaths to 100 000 births). Despite important improvements made in healthcare access for young mothers, the gap between rural and urban areas is still persistent. (The Millennium Development Goals Report 2014, United Nations, 2014, p.29)</p>
<p>MDG6 – Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases</p>	<p>According to calculations based on data from Health Nutrition and Population Statistics by Wealth Quintile, WB 2014, in 2012, approximately 35m people were living with AIDS/HIV in the world. 58% were women and 3,3m were persons under 15 years old.The share of newly infected persons dropped by 33 percent between 2001 and 2012. Sub-Saharan countries are the most affected by HIV/AIDS and it remains the region where almost 70 percent (1,6m cases) of the estimated number of new infected cases have occurred in 2012. (The Millennium Development Goals Report 2014, United Nations, 2014, pp.35-36)In 2012, access to ART (the Antiretroviral therapy) has saved 1,6m people and 9,5m have received treatment. It is estimated that ART has averted almost 6,6m AIDS/HIV-related deaths between 1995 and 2012.Malaria is another sub-target or MDG6 and, according to estimations provided by the WHO, has killed almost 600,000 people in 2013. The majority of these deaths occurred among under-five children living in Sub-Saharan countries. (The Millennium Development Goals Report 2014, United Nations, 2014, pp.37-38)</p>
<p>MDG7 – ensuring environmental sustainability</p>	<p>According to the Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Center and World Development Indicators Database, global emissions of carbon dioxide have increased by 50 percent between 1990 and 2012. (The Global Monitoring Report 2014, p.176).By 2010, all countries stopped using ozone-depleting substances that affect our Ozone layer (because of the commitments made after the signature of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, 1987).The Red List Index has revealed that the biological diversity is threatened and there is a risk of extinction for many species (i.e. some mammal species, insect pollinators). (The Millennium Development Goals Report 2014, United Nations, 2014, pp.43-44)Despite the important progress made in improving sanitation facilities and adequate water access, better access to improved water sources is still a major problem in some areas such as the Sub-Saharan countries where the share of population with access to water sources raised from 48 per cent in 1990 to only 64 per cent in 2012. (The Global Monitoring Report 2014, p.176).</p>
<p>MDG8 – developing a global partnership for development</p>	<p>All the above mentioned MDGs (1 to 7) cannot be met without consistent aid for development coming in terms of a partnership between developed and developing countries. According to OECD, ODA provided by OECD and DAC, expressed in real terms, has dropped by 6 percent in 2010; moreover, as a share of their GNI, ODA provided by DAC members decreased bellow half of the target fixed by the UN (0,7 percent of their GNI). ((The Millennium Development Goals Report 2014, United Nations, 2014, pp.48-49)</p>

Sustainable Development Goals: What now?

(by Adela Militaru)

Efforts of the international community to ambitiously meet the indicators of the MDGs until 2015 have generated a considerable progress so far, by engaging and mobilizing world leaders to adhere to the common development agenda which was readopted at the Rio +20 Summit in June 2012. The outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, “The future we want”, builds on the MDGs – their structure, the mechanisms of their implementation, the

challenges faced, and the lessons learned¹, serving as a solid foundation to be integrated in the post-2015 development agenda. Its vision specifically highlights three dimensions standing at the core of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental sustainability. These dimensions are the driving forces behind the 17 SDGs, elaborated by the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals², which are ready to be adopted in September 2015, at the UN Summit in New York. In the next section, we shall take a closer look at the advancements proposed by the SDGs under these three dimensions, as a renewed commitment of the international community towards achieving the vision of a world that is “just, equitable and inclusive” (UN Open Working Group Proposal for SDGs).



SDGs and a world of development

The most crucial indicator of achieving economic sustainability, now standing out as “the single, most *urgent* task in all of the interconnected challenges of sustainable development”, is the eradication of *extreme* poverty (Sachs, 2014, p.482). As a legacy of the MDGs, the post-2015 development agenda strives to keep one of the fundamental promises that the UN has made to humanity: to *end poverty, in all its forms, everywhere*. It then comes as no surprise that this is the exact formulation of Goal 1, which is reinforced by Goal 2: *end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture*. Both these goals rely on the need for sustained economic growth and

inclusive economic policies, of which employment creation is a precondition that remains in focus under the post-2015 agenda (see ILO, 2009; Melamed & Scott, 2011). To such end, several initiatives have been put in place, such as the International Labor Organization's Decent Work Agenda, which encourages full and productive employment, decent working conditions, and social protection as cumulative measures for sustainable economic growth. These propositions are subsumed in Goal 8.

What seems to be a special focus of the post-2015 development agenda, under both the economic and environmental dimensions, is the role of current *consumption and production patterns* to ensure the sustainable management of global resources, which include the conservation of *oceans, seas and marine resources* (Goal 14), as well as *terrestrial ecosystems, to halt biodiversity loss* (Goal 15). The need for *sustainable consumption and production* has been highlighted under Goal 12. This goal is nonetheless mutually reinforcing with several other goals which promote environmental awareness and sustainability, as scientific evidence on the impact of industrialization on climate change is increasingly alerting the international community.

It is now a shared responsibility of multiple stakeholders, ranging from governments to civil society and businesses, to *take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*, as set forth in Goal 13, and in doing so, to *build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation* (Goal 9). Therefore, it is our common challenge to enhance our capacity to innovate our current economic, social and environmental practices, in order to propose achievable measures to support sustainable development for all, that are able to encompass the needs to *ensure availability of water and sanitation for all* (Goal 6), as well as *access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all* (Goal 7). As the experience of implementing the MDGs has taught us, this endeavor is not

bound to be easily achievable.

So far, the measures discussed have seen the economic and environmental dimensions at work, in the formulation of their corresponding goals. With regards to the social development aspect, we are still faced with profound discrepancies between the world's inhabitants, despite the evolution based on the previous MDG agenda under some of these aspects. As posited by Goal 10, one of the post-2015 priorities for achieving sustainable development is to *reduce inequality within and among countries*, while at the same time *making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable* (Goal 11).

To this end, the SDGs bring significant advancements as compared to the previous MDG approach, insomuch as they incorporate some important suggestions of the critics of MDGs, who point out that concepts of equity and equality had been insufficiently addressed by the former Millennium agenda (Fehling et al., 2013). Generally, we can see an important paradigm shift whereby the process of elaboration of the SDGs responded to previous critical voices concerning the MDG's limited approach to incorporating important human rights, reported by some voices as "missing targets" of the MDGs, i.e. decent work, governance, and peace and security (Melamed & Scott, 2011). In the same note of improvement, Goals 3 and 4 also seem to bring added value by aiming to *ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*, and *ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*, respectively.

Clearly, the focus has moved from very specific targets to overarching measures promoting well-being, which indeed appear as more equitable and inclusive than their previous counterparts. Equality also continues to lie at the core of the post-2015 development agenda, and it appears as no surprise that achieving *gender equality and empowering all women and girls* (Goal 5) should continue to represent a

crucial target for social development. In order to secure all these advancements, it is fundamental to *build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels*, which prove enough resourceful in order to *promote peaceful and inclusive societies* and *provide access to justice for all* (Goal 16). In this respect, it also proves decisive to *strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development* (Goal 17).

The value(s) of SDGs

Based on all previous advancements and reports of the past years, in 2013 the UN Secretary General published a report entitled "*A life of dignity for all*". Dignity as a leading value in the fight against extreme poverty seems to be a fundamental milestone when speaking about the advancement of the post-2015 development agenda. In fact, at a closer look, what all SDGs seem to have in common is a value system that incorporates core values such as freedom, equality, peace, good governance, and respect for human rights and for nature. Achieving sustainability in ensuring a just and inclusive world is a commitment made by multiple stakeholders, not only for our own benefit, but also for that of future generations.

Many important directions which helped draft the current Sustainable Development Goals have emerged from the continuous interaction of science and policy, particularly through the mobilization of epistemic communities (or knowledge communities), described by Sachs (2014). However, having the knowledge on how sustainable development could be achieved is no guarantee in itself: as stated in the prototype Global Sustainable Development Report (2014), political will remains a necessary precondition for the successful implementation of any of the measures developed with a view to facilitate the enactment of the SDGs. Naturally, achieving long-term success of such complex agenda of sustainable development requires policy coherence on a large scale (UN Prototype Report, 2014), which in turn requires the condition of good governance

(Sachs, 2014).

Therefore, the current value of the Sustainable Development Goals, as part of the post-2015 development agenda, lies in concentrating available knowledge, know-how, and long-term commitment from all sectors and stakeholders. All of these cannot be translated into achievable measures in the absence of political will, nor of good governance. But what we now know is that the SDGs are offering the world a common vision of the process of achieving sustainable development, in order to keep its promise of ensuring a life of dignity and well-being to all people, for generations to come.

References

Melamed, C., Scott, L. (2011). *After 2015: progress and challenges for development*, Background Note. Overseas Development Institute available from <<http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/7061.pdf>>, last accessed November 23, 2014.

Sachs, J.D. (2014). Chapter 14: Sustainable Development Goals. In *The Age of Sustainable Development*. pp. 481-512 Columbia University Press Online Access, available from <<http://cupola.columbia.edu/age-of-sustainable-development/493>>, last accessed November 23, 2014.

Fehling, M., Nelson, B., Venkatapuram. S. (2013). *Limitations of the Millennium Development Goals: a literature review*, available from <www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3877943>, last accessed November 23, 2014.

McGillivray, M. (2008). *Achieving the Millennium Development Goals*. Palgrave, London.

United Nations (2014). *Prototype Global Sustainable Development Report*. Online unedited edition. New York: United

Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, available from sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1454Prototype%20Global%20SD%20Report.pdf, last accessed November 23, 2014.

United Nations General Assembly Sept. 2001. *Road map towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration: report of the Secretary-General*, UN Document no. A/56/326. New York, available from <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/docs/56/a56326.pdf>, last accessed November 23, 2014.

United Nations (2014). *The Millennium Development Goals Report*, available from <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2014%20MDG%20report/MDG%202014%20English%20web.pdf>, last accessed November 23, 2014.

The World Bank Group Flagship Report (2014). *Ending Poverty and Sharing Responsibility*, available from http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/gmr/gmr2014/GMR_2014_Full_Report.pdf, last accessed November 23, 2014

Vandemoortele, J. (2012). *Advancing the UN Development Agenda Post-2015: Some Practical Suggestions*, available from http://www.wssinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/resources/DESA-post-2015-paper-Vandemoortele.pdf, last accessed November 23, 2014.

¹ Review of the contributions of the MDG Agenda to foster development: Lessons for the post-2015 UN development agenda, Discussion Note. UN system task team on the post-2015 development agenda, available from www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/mdg_assessment_Aug.pdf, last accessed November 23, 2014.

²Open Working Group proposal for Sustainable Development Goals, for an overview, see sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgsproposal.html, document

available at undocs.org/A/68/970, last accessed November 23, 2014.

Photo credits:

“Above, people carry drinking water in Bangladesh. ” by
Mohammad Rakibul Hasan, UNDP.