

The Millennium Development Goals and Beyond: Pro-Poor Policy in a Changing World.

INTRODUCTION

The MDGs were an approach born of a benign era of relative stability, strong economic growth and fairly buoyant aid budgets. We now face a very different world. The crisis/post-crisis context is, of course, central to many MDG questions not only in terms of crisis impacts on the MDGs and poverty but also in the impact on development commitments internationally and nationally.

WHAT ARE THE MDGS FOR?

The MDGs are a set of indicators, but they are also an idea or 'global norm' for poverty reduction, an incentive structure for pro-poor development and a view of 'development' in themselves. Perhaps the defining question is how global agreements and conventions change poor people's lives? For example, Manning argues the MDGs should be taken 'to encourage sustainable pro-poor development progress and donor support of domestic efforts in this direction'. Hulme argues the MDGs are a 'global norm' institutionalizing poverty reduction but what is needed now is 'strategies to shift international norms so that the citizens of the present rich countries and future rich countries find the existence of extreme poverty in an affluent world morally unacceptable'. The MDG 'paradigm' itself can be seen as a broader 'human development meets results-based management' (see again Hulme) consisting of the quantitative targets of the MDGs but be extended to the much broader Millennium Declaration.

MDG IMPACTS SO FAR

The recent emergence of an 'MDG impacts' literature (e.g. Fukuda-Parr; Hulme; Manning) has asked what are the MDG impacts to date – in terms of adoption (in policy), allocation (of resources), and adaptation (to locally defined goals, indicators and targets) and what the impacts mean looking forward. As Manning notes, the impact of the MDGs on international development discourse has been immense. Manning goes on to discuss, looking at actual spending patterns for example, that it is possible that the MDGs have had the impact of pushing donor spending towards the social sectors, since social indicators provided the bulk of the targets. In contrast, Fukuda-Parr, reviewing donor priorities and measuring them against the MDGs, finds weaker links between the stated priorities of donors and the MDGs.

A second impact issue around influence is how far the MDGs have affected policy making and policy dialogues within developing countries themselves. Here the evidence is also hard to come by. Fukuda-Parr's review of how far PRSPs have incorporated the MDGs shows that MDGs are partially integrated into national level planning, but that some references do exist. Richard Manning suggests that the MDGs have helped some civil society groups to hold governments in developing countries to account for their

decisions. In contrast, the UNDP (2009) recent study of 30 countries is important here and revealing (as Manning notes). 25 countries of those 30 countries had added, expanded or modified indicators and ten had added local goals. An important question is why is it that some countries have clear evidence of national ownership of the MDGs and others have little or none?

MDG MOMENTUM TO 2015 AND BEYOND

There are a number of cross-cutting issues that have risen in prominence since 2000 as a result of changing policy discourses such as climate, gender, and equity (see respectively Urban; Jones et al.; Jahan; Fukuda-Parr, Vandemoortele). These issues were around in 2000 but less prominent and less integrated into MDGs.

A further question, related to this is around 'paradigms'. Do the MDGs still reflect what we know about what is important about how 'development' happens and how policy can influence that process? New and emerging 'paradigmatic' lenses for thinking about development and what development is about include those that were well established in 2000 such as Rights (see Robinson and Langford) and those that have come the fore since, or are 'bubbling under' such as Wellbeing, (see McGregor and Sumner) Social Protection, (see Jones et al.) and Universalism (see Fischer).

Though the academic and policy debates around how to measure development are important what matters, as Wickstead reminds us, the central question is do the MDGs still have political resonance? He argues convincingly that 'far from losing their political resonance, in fact, the MDGs have retained their ability to act as a rallying point for development progress'.

The debate around what, if anything can and should succeed the MDGs after 2015 is still in its very early stages and many fear talking about this will derail the momentum for the MDGs. It is also a debate which may prove to be purely theoretical unless strong political momentum develops behind the assertion that there is a need for any successor agreement to the MDGs.

The good news is what we can do, which we could not do in 2000, is to have a genuinely global, coordinated process of roundtables, voices of the poor, blogging, and uploaded videos. Think of the UN conferences of the 1990s or Ravi Kanbur's World Development Report 2000/1 pre-process + Voices of the Poor + Web 2.0. Think of *tweeting* the UN Secretary General.

Such a global process might culminate in a 'new development consensus' that would build on the key achievements of the current MDG consensus.

Sumner, A. and Melamed, C. (2010) The MDGs and Beyond: pro-poor policy in a changing world. IDS Bulletin 41.1