Synthesis Paper - The Power of Numbers: A Critical Review of MDG Targets for Human Development and Human Rights

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Preface

This paper is one of a series of papers in a research project, *The Power of Numbers: A Critical Review of MDG Targets for Human Development and Human Rights (the "Project")* [*]. Motivated by a concern with the consequences of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) beyond the achievement of the 2015 targets, the Project seeks to explore their broader policy and programmatic implications. It focuses particularly on the reductionism inherent in the way in which these global goals were set and came to be used, as well as the potential for distorting priorities and marginalizing, or even displacing, important human development and human rights concerns inherent in such global goal-setting exercises. A total of 11 studies are included, each analyzing the normative and empirical consequences of a particular MDG goal/target, and considering what other targets and indicators might have been more appropriate. The Project aims to identify criteria for selecting indicators for setting targets that would be more consistent with Human Development and Human Rights priorities, amenable to monitoring impacts on inequality, accountability and consistency with human rights standards.

Although this paper is currently accessible as a free standing working paper, it should be read in conjunction with the background paper and the 11 individual papers written as part of Power of Numbers Project. These working papers are expected to be compiled as a special issue of the *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*.

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Abstract

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were heralded as opening a new chapter in international development, and have led to the use of global goals and target setting as a central instrument defining the international development agenda. Despite this increased importance, little is understood about the ways in which global goals achieve their influence in shaping priorities and actions of the key stakeholders, and the ensuing consequences. Quantification inherently involves simplification, reification and abstraction of complex, intangible and location specific objectives. This paper highlights the key findings and conclusions of the Power of Numbers project (the "Project"), initiated to undertake 11 case studies of the effects of selected MDG goals/targets, including both the empirical effects on policy priorities and strategies and normative effects on development discourses about important objectives and means to achieve them. The Project evaluated whether these effects furthered the vision of the Millennium Declaration for development that is people centered, drawing specifically on human rights principles and human development priorities. The Project found that the effects varied considerably from one goal/target to another. Many contributed to mobilizing political support while others were 'poor cousins' and made little difference. All led to unintended consequences in diverting attention from other important objectives and reshaping development thinking. Many of the indicators were poorly selected and contributed to distorting effects. The Project concludes that target setting is a valuable tool but has important limitations, and that the methodology for target setting should be refined to include policy responsiveness in addition to data availability criteria.

INTRODUCTION

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were heralded as opening a new chapter in international development. They have been described as 'the most broadly supported, comprehensive and specific poverty reduction targets the world has ever established' (Vandemoortele, 2011) and are widely credited with having mobilized and maintained support for global poverty reduction (Waage et al., 2010). The enthusiasm over these successes of the MDGs appears to have entrenched global goal setting as a central policy instrument of global governance for development. As we draft this paper, wide-ranging consultations among national governments, civil society groups, academics, and development agencies regarding the setting of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are dominating debates in the development field regarding the development agenda to succeed the 2015 expiry of the MDGs.

Despite this newfound prominence, and the virtually universal acceptance of the value of global goal setting, the ways in which global goals achieve their influence in shaping priorities and actions of the key stakeholders, and the ensuing consequences, are not well understood. The critical debates and literature on the MDGs have focused on whether the 2015 targets are likely to be met, and on a critique of their composition, methodology for target setting, and negotiating process[1]. However, the MDGs as a consensus development agenda have had wide-reaching influence on both policy priorities and on development thought. Their effects include both intended and unintended consequences, which may be positive or perverse (Nayyar, 2013). The intended policy objective of the MDGs was to draw attention to important but neglected social priorities but they have taken on the broader role of defining a development strategy. Used in this way, target setting can also unintentionally distort priorities by displacing attention from other objectives, by disrupting on-going programs as well as advocacy alliances, creating perverse incentives and undermining alternative analyses and policy strategies.

The Power of Numbers project (the "Project") was initiated to undertake 11 case studies of MDG goals/targets on development agendas, including both the empirical effects on policy priorities and strategies and normative effects on development discourses about important objectives and means to achieve them. In particular, the Project evaluated whether these effects furthered the vision of the Millennium Declaration for development that is people centered[2], drawing specifically on human rights principles and human development priorities.

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The Project's title is the Power of Numbers because the risks of perverse unintended consequences are particularly strong given the reductionism inherent in quantification. Social scientists who have studied the use of numbers as a governance tool and have warned of the potentially distorting effects of indicators in redefining concepts that they are intended to measure (Porter, 1994) (Poovey, 1998). The core strength of the MDGs, as with all global goals, is that they express important social objectives in the form of concrete outcomes that can be measured. However, translating social phenomena such as poverty reduction or gender equality in measurable outcomes involves a transformation that reifies intangible phenomena, simplifies complex concepts, and abstracts social change from local contexts. That the MDGs presented a simple, short list, of measurable outcomes communicated the urgent ethical norm of ending poverty, yet in the process, it also may have transformed the meaning of that objective. The Project explores how the very strengths of the MDGs – simplicity, measurability and concreteness –also proved to be the sources of distortion.

The Project examines a series of questions that have received little systematic scholarly attention until now. For example, the MDGs created incentives by numeric target setting, which were used to set standards and facilitate monitoring. But what were the empirical consequences of these incentives on policy priorities reflected for example in resource allocations of national governments and donors? The MDGs communicated the urgency of ending poverty in a particular way. What were the normative consequences of this form of communication on discourses that define key problems and identify particular solutions?

A better understanding of the incentives that global goals create and their intended and unintended effects is essential in order to sharpen the methodology for setting targets and selecting indicators. While goals may be defined on normative grounds – reflecting consensus on important political objectives for the global society – setting quantitative targets and selecting indicators must be guided by technocratic criteria. Without an understanding of the effects of goals, global goal setting will proceed in the dark, and the possibilities for achieving transformative change through development will be drastically undermined.

In this overview paper of the Project, we highlight some key findings and conclusions from the 11 studies and draw lessons for criteria that should guide target setting and indicator selection in the post-2015 agenda setting and Sustainable Development Goals setting processes that are now

underway. After briefly setting out the analytical and evaluative framework of the Project, we analyze the major findings in terms of intended and unintended consequences. The intended consequences relate to mobilizing attention and funding, which the papers in the Project found were achieved with varying success across the different MDGs. Among the unintended consequences we look both at policy effects, including diverting attention from important objectives and challenges and silo effects on programming; knowledge effects; and effects on political dynamics, as well as the idiosyncrasies of the choices of targets and indicators. We then discuss global target setting and criteria for indicator selection from the perspective of human development and human rights.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Analytical framework: The Power of Numbers

One of the core powers of goals, such as the MDGs, is derived from the exercise of numerical target setting and the selection of measurement indicators. The Project draws on the conceptual model developed in the recent Sociology of Knowledge literature, particularly on 'indicators as a technology of governance' that models the effects of indicators[3]. According to this model, indicators exert influence in two ways: by setting performance standards against which progress can be monitored, rewarded or penalized; and by creating a 'knowledge effect' where the indicators intended to reflect a concept effectively redefine it. Performance standards create incentives for behavior change on the part of policy makers, opinion makers, civil society groups, businesses and the public. Knowledge effects can redefine the purpose of development, the key constraints and the means to address them.

In an effort to explore how the MDGs created incentives for behavior (policy) change and knowledge (ideas) change, this Project undertook 11 case studies, each focused on a specific goal or target (see list in appendix). Each study examined:

- the analytical and normative origins of each goal/target;
- the political economy of setting the specific goal and targets;
- the empirical effects on policy priorities;
- the normative effects on discourses and narratives;
- the choice of specific indicators used and the effects created; and

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- alternative indicators that could have been used.

It is important to note that this is not a collection of case studies about what occurred under the MDGs in specific countries. Although many of the papers mention specific country contexts to illustrate trends or issues, the Project's focus was on the impacts at the global level.

Evaluative framework: Human Development and Human Rights

In evaluating these empirical (policy) and normative (ideas) effects, the Project is concerned with whether they furthered the vision of the Millennium Declaration (the "Declaration") for development that is people centered and inclusive. More specifically, the criteria used derive from the frameworks of human rights and capabilities approaches to development[4]. While the MDGs have come to be interpreted as a development framework, they originated as a monitoring framework. This distinction is important in driving unintended consequences as discussed further below.

The MDGs originated in the Declaration (United Nations, 2000) adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2000.The Declaration is a normative document that world leaders adopted to outline key objectives for the twenty first century. It is motivated by shared values, as set out in its first chapter, including: freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility (United Nations, 2000 para 1). It also commits governments to a particular pattern of growth and development, one that is equitable and supports human rights (Fukuda-Parr, 2012; Langford, Sumner, and Yamin, 2013). The Declaration's goals were first introduced as MDGs in the 2001 'Road Map' document (United Nations, 2001). The Road Map was the Secretary General's implementation plan for the Declaration, created for the purposes of 'harmonizing reporting' on the progress of the Declaration. The MDGs appeared as a culmination of a decade of attempts to redefine the development agenda throughout the 1990s, to focus on improving human wellbeing as the central objective of development rather than on the economic performance. Central to these attempts were the series of UN development conferences of the decade. Some of the most widely recognized include the 1990 World Summit for Children in New York, the Jomtien Conference on Education in 1990, the 1992 Earth Summit at Rio, the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, the 1994 World Social Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen in 1994, the 1995 Fourth

World Conference on Women in Beijing, the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome, and the 1996 Conference on Human Settlements in Istanbul. These conferences were not the typical UN processes. They were highly participatory events that included a broad range of stakeholders including civil society groups, development agencies, and government representatives of sectoral agencies as well as representatives of ministries of foreign affairs (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2007). Many of the Declarations and Agendas for Action adopted at these conferences emphasized the promotion of human rights as a central principle behind the development agenda in question, even if there was not as yet a human rights-based approach to development. Another common theme of these Declarations, driven no doubt in response to the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s, was the emphasis on reducing exclusion and inequality and guiding the global economy to a path of *inclusive globalization* (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Development, 2007).

Implicit in much of the language of these Conference Declarations, if not in development practice at the time, was a conceptual approach to development rooted in the international human rights framework, as well as the human development framework. While human rights and human development are distinct conceptual frameworks, each with its own intellectual origins and histories, they are closely related[5] (Sen, 2005; UNDP, 2000; Nussbaum, 2011; OHCHR, 2006; Vizard, et al., 2011). Both are motivated by a fundamental concern with the dignity and freedom of the individual, and see the purpose of development as expanding those freedoms and the conditions under which people can enjoy them.

Human rights have different meanings in different contexts; they are ethical principles as well as legal norms, and the way they have been used in development discourse and practice—and even among authors in this Project – is highly variable. Nonetheless, these diverse approaches all emphasize the application of international human rights norms and standards in evaluating development outcomes and the design of policies, the obligations of states under these legal frameworks. The common set of principles identified in the 2003 UN 'Common Understanding on a rights-based approach' has become widely accepted by practitioners in this field and include:

- *Universality and inalienability*: Human rights are universal and inalienable. All people everywhere in the world are entitled to them. The human person in whom they inhere cannot voluntarily give them up. Nor can others take them away from him or her.

- *Indivisibility*: Human rights are indivisible. Whether of a civil, cultural, economic, political or social nature, they are all inherent to the dignity of every human person.

- *Inter-dependence* and *Inter-relatedness*. The realization of one right often depends, wholly or in part, upon the realization of others. For instance, realization of the right to health may depend, in certain circumstances, on realization of the right to education or of the right to information.

- *Equality and Non-discrimination:* All individuals are equal as human beings and by virtue of the inherent dignity of each human person. All human beings are entitled to their human rights without discrimination of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, ethnicity, age, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, disability, property, birth or other status as explained by the human rights treaty bodies.

- *Participation and Inclusion:* Every person and all peoples are entitled to active, free and meaningful participation in, contribution to, and enjoyment of civil, economic, social, cultural and political development in which human rights and fundamental freedoms can be realized.

- *Accountability and Rule of Law:* States and other duty-bearers are answerable for the observance of human rights. Where they fail to do so, aggrieved rights-holders are entitled to institute proceedings for appropriate redress before a competent court or other adjudicator in accordance with the rules and procedures provided by law.

Thus, human rights is more explicitly concerned with enabling people to claim their entitlements through legal as well as other means. However, when applied to evaluate development policy and outcomes, both the human rights and human development frameworks emphasize the following: the well-being of the individual as the central objective of development; equality and non-discrimination in access to economic and social opportunities; meaningful participation of individuals in decisions that affect their lives and well-being; and adherence to international human rights standards.

What are the MDGs? From a communications tool to a policy agenda

As already noted, global goals were included in the Millennium Declaration to help mobilize political support. They were to serve as a tool of communication – to express in concrete terms what was meant by ending poverty. The MDGs were introduced as monitoring indicators, as benchmarks, to "harmonize reporting" on the goals laid out in the Millennium Declaration (UN, 2001). Yet in the process, the goals became transformed into a policy agenda and a planning framework.

The MDGs made the commitments monitorable by structuring and elaborating them with the quantitative indicators, timelines and more specific numerical or proportional targets. The MDGs introduced a nested structure of goals, each of which has a handful of targets, each of which in turn has at least one indicator. The goals themselves are more normative or aspirational than technical, in the sense that they contain neither explicit numbers, proportions, dates or timelines. The purpose of the targets is to assign numerical, time-bound objectives to these goals. The indicators are the actual data or statistics used to monitor progress towards those targets.

In explaining the selection of goals and targets, the Road Map declares that they should be limited in number, stable over time, and clear, so that they will "help to trigger action and promote new alliances for development" (UN, 2001). Despite the aim of a limited number of goals and targets, the indicators were also to be "comprehensive" (UN, 2001). The translation from goals to targets to indicators was not consistent for each goal, and this process itself has been a point of contention and criticism. While the targets were largely lifted "verbatim" from the Declaration, one change was to firmly set the "start point" on proportional reduction goals as 1990 (Vandemoortele, 2011). The only indicator that was explicitly included in the Declaration was the proportion of people living below a dollar a day. Vandemoortele (2011) describes the inclusion of this indicator as a political decision, resulting from the desire for a "money-metric" definition of poverty. The Road Map also explicitly states that the MDGs should not undercut or replace the goals of the conferences of the 1990s.

The MDGs, then, were not intended to be planning targets, or to serve as the means for setting an agenda themselves. As the MDGs were placed at the forefront of the UN agenda, however, the intended use and interpretation became increasingly altered. The distinction between goals,

targets, and indicators has become increasingly blurred, resulting in conceptual confusion concerning the MDGs and their use. The Secretary General's 2005 report, entitled "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all," argues for the urgency of achieving the goals by the deadline, and discusses the goals as national planning targets. Countries that already had poverty reduction strategies were to alter them so as to be able to achieve the MDGs within the desired time frame (UN, 2005). Also out in 2005, the report "Investing in Development" (UN Millennium Project, 2005) accelerated the shift in thinking from "benchmarks" to development agenda. The report's stated purpose was to "describe how to achieve the Millennium Development Goals." The report outlined country level processes for achieving the targets, and explicitly recommended national strategies aimed at "the quantitative targets set out in the MDGs." (UN Millennium Project, 2005). The 2010 declaration "Keeping the promise: united to achieve the Millennium Development Goals" makes several statements about overarching goals such as poverty eradication and sustainable development, but the bulk of the document consists of listing each goal, and then suggesting several actions directly related to achieving said goal. The agenda is very much defined by the actions deemed necessary to achieve each specific goal.

This use of the MDGs is problematic for several reasons. First, the targets and indicators, as described above, were originally intended to monitor and report on progress towards the normative agenda set by the 1990s conferences and the Declaration. By 2005, the UN was arguing that individual countries should alter their policy programs to reach those specific quantitative targets, and the lists of UN recommended policies in the 2010 resolution were entirely comprised of actions specifically related to the achievement of the eight goals. The application of the targets to country level planning was also problematic from a technical standpoint; the ability to estimate costs and policies necessary to meet the targets was probably overstated from the start (Reddy and Heuty 2008). Further, several researchers have shown that the goals were inherently implausible for many individual countries, and were therefore "biased" in the sense that countries beginning at a lower point, including many African countries, were more likely to be labeled "failures" for not meeting the goals (Clemens, et al., 2007; Easterly 2009; Vandemoortele, 2009). Conversely, the goals may have been "too easy" for some countries. For example, many countries had already achieved or were very near to achieving universal primary education when the goals were set. Vandemoortele (2009) argues that the

targets were never intended to be and should not be applied nationally since the targets and timelines were set by extrapolating global trends.

The UN has not been consistent in this regard, encouraging country adaptation but also reporting on whether individual countries or regions are "on pace" to achieve the targets (Fukuda-Parr, et al., 2013). Indeed, international development debates for a time were dominated by discussions of whether the goals would be met, often on a country-specific level, perhaps responding to a demand from the public and politicians for 'results based management' in development aid (Hulme, 2010). The representation of the MDGs on official materials continues to be confused, as well as confusing. The UN website providing the official list of official goals, targets, and indicators, on the other hand, includes a quote from the Road Map which explains that the goals "represent a partnership between the developed countries and the developing countries 'to create an environment - at the national and global levels alike - which is conducive to development and the elimination of poverty" (UN *Millenium Development Goals Indicators* website). The intended meaning of "represent a partnership" to "create an environment…conducive to development" is unclear. Similarly, the main UN website devoted to the MDGs describes them as a "blueprint" agreed to by the world's development institutions (UN *United Nations Millenium Development Goals* website). This conception is also confusing; the MDGs themselves are a list of outcomes, not a "blueprint." Recall, the original stated purpose of the MDGs was to harmonize reporting towards the broader normative agenda described in the Declaration. As argued earlier in this paper, they were not and should not be considered a description of a full plan or agenda for development as implied by the term "blueprint."

FINDINGS

Although the selection and implementation of each target/goal had its own trajectory and consequences, some common themes emerge.

Choice of targets and indicators

In some cases, despite emphases on methodological rigor and data reliability in arguments for the MDGs, the Project studies reveal that the indicators and targets chosen were weakly conceptualized and added to the reductionist policy and knowledge effects discussed below.

Yamin and Boulanger point out that Goal 5's maternal mortality ratios were known to be notoriously difficult to measure for both statistical and practical reasons, and are ill-suited to being used as national planning devices—which is what happened. This created incentives for investing in ever-more-sophisticated data modeling and analysis based on poor data, while in many cases, the health management information systems that are meant to collect information for planning purposes languished.

Fukuda-Parr and Orr argue that Goal 1/Target B --to halve the proportion of the population that is undernourished --drove a caloric consumption dimension of hunger. The selection of this metric of hunger based on calorie consumption was reinforced by the second indicator of weight for age which also reflects caloric consumption, and neglects other dimensions of food insecurity including under-nutrition and insecurity. Alternative indicators, such as weight for height and price volatility in national price indices, would have monitored these dimensions which capture food insecurity as a longer-term challenge.

Caliari explains that for Goal 8, the only goal with specific obligations for developed countries, the targets and indicators are significantly vaguer than for most of the other goals, lacking specific numbers, quantities, or time periods for completion. Similarly, Cohen argues that MDG 7, Target D--on slums-- is 'neither precise, nor evidence based, nor framed to confirm achievement or not'. He argues that taken to its logical conclusion, the choice of the '100 million slum dwellers' target would lead to an operational implementation plan that depended solely on building more sanitation and housing facilities as elaborated by the Millennium Project. It thus misses the point, not only in its minimal reach to some 5 percent of the concerned population, but diverts attention from the key role of the city in economic growth, empowerment and climate change.

Diaz-Martinez and Gibbons discuss the inappropriateness of indicator 4.3, the proportion of children immunized against measles. According to recent estimates, the authors explain, measles was the cause of only 4 percent of under-five mortality. The decision to make measles immunization one of only three indicators for child mortality was perhaps motivated by the ease of vaccination as compared to other diseases, instead of the proportion of deaths that measles causes.

Intended consequences – mobilizing attention and effort

Though the MDGs were interpreted and used in multiple ways, the policy purpose of global goals in global governance is to mobilize support and attention to important but neglected objectives (Jolly, 2004). John Ruggie, the chief architect behind the Declaration explains that the list of goals needed to be simple enough and memorable (Weiss, 2001) while Michael Doyle, his predecessor who authored the Road Map and the MDGs, aimed for a package that would achieve ownership from the donors who had previously accepted the International Development Goals (IDGs) (Weiss, 2004).

Broad goals were not enough. The then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and his chief advisers pressed for time-bound targets in the Declaration to communicate the urgency of poverty reduction as one of the top priorities for the 21st century (Vandemoortele, 2011). They were inspired by the traction that the OECD's 1996 IDGs had created in mobilizing support for development aid in the donor countries[6]. According to a consensus assessment by the 60+ members of the UN Task Team on Post 2015, an important success of the MDGs, when taken together, was to have garnered support for development and poverty as global priorities (UN System Task Team on the Post 2015 UN Development Agenda). Gentilini and Sumner argue, for example, that the setting of the poverty eradication MDG was the culmination of a process that moved the "poverty agenda" from being relatively neglected before the 1990s to the "cornerstone of the development agenda" by the time the goals were set. However, an important finding of the Project is that the eight goals and 21 targets and the 60 associated indicators did not all have the same effect. Some of the goals and targets garnered significant attention in terms of funding as well as programs and research, while others were 'poor cousins' and made little difference.

The goal for global diseases may have been very successful in terms of garnering support for HIV treatment, if not necessarily malaria or tuberculosis. Nattrass argues however that it was not the 'MDG dog that wagged the HIV tail' but the other way round. The MDGs were a part and parcel of the activism that engaged multiple actors at local, national and global levels in the HIV/AIDS movement. Although the global HIV/AIDS activist movement and increase in some funding had already begun prior to the MDGs, Peter Piot, the head of UNAIDS, ensured that HIV/AIDS would be included in the list and used it in advocacy to mobilize support and funding.

Moreover, the HIV community continued to lobby for inclusion of their agenda in the MDG framework and succeeded in including the access to treatment target.

The targets for water, child survival, sanitation and maternal mortality also succeeded in drawing attention to priorities that had long been neglected, but their impacts were far more limited and ambiguous. Outcome trends show important progress for these goals, and there was a dramatic increase in donor funding for the social sectors to meet basic needs as a whole, particularly in specific categories of health spending (see Table 1). However, progress varied and often overlooked equity concerns. Primary school enrolment, child survival and water show important progress in aggregate national outcomes as measured by the targets since 2000 but Unterhalter, Diaz-Martinez and Gibbons, and Langford and Winkler argue respectively in their papers that the progress was uneven across populations and continued to marginalize the poorest. Langford and Winkler point out that sanitation gained more visibility though progress in outcomes was better for clean water, while Yamin and Boulanger question what can be asserted with respect to the reported progress in maternal mortality ratios in specific countries, due to statistical and practical issues relating to both the collection and interpretation of MMR data.

Table 1. Percent of Development Assistance Committee Bilateral Commitments by Sector (% of Sector Allocable Aid)			
Major categories of Sector Allocable Aid and selected subcategories	Average 1995-2000	Average 2001-2006	Average 2007- 2011
1. Social Infrastructure & Services	43%	57%	55%
Education	10%	14%	12%
Health	6%	8%	6%
STD and HIV Control	1%	4%	7%
Water Supply & Sanitation	10%	7%	7%
2. Economic Infrastructure & Services	32%	21%	22%
3. Production Sectors	13%	10%	10%
Agriculture	7%	5%	5%
Food Crop Production	<1%	<1%	<1%
4. Multisector/cross-cutting	12%	12%	13%
OECD. Query Wizard for International Development Statistics. 2012. http://stats.oecd.org/qwids/ (accessed May 2013). Authors' calculations.			

On the other hand, there were targets that made little difference to mobilizing political attention.

Despite the hunger target, the food, agriculture and nutrition agenda continued to be

marginalized from national and international agendas, reflected, for example in the stagnant proportion of aid to agriculture and to food production in particular (Fukuda-Parr and Orr). The issue has now emerged as a top global political priority, backed by several global initiatives and mentioned consistently in G-8 summits; but this was a response to the 2008 'food crisis' and not the launch of the MDGs in 2001. Similarly, as Van der Hoeven writes in his paper, employment has continued to be a neglected issue. Both were issues that were embedded as targets in the broader poverty goal that encompassed income poverty, employment and hunger. The latter two were overshadowed by attention to the income poverty target. Progress towards the, employment and hunger targets languished and these lackluster results have received relatively little notice[7]. Caliari reflects a widely shared view in concluding that the goal on a global partnership for development– aid, debt, trade, technology transfer—which is the only goal to have no accompanying indicators, has also made little difference. There was progress in debt relief and total aid commitments increased (Table 2), although only very slightly as a proportion of the GNI of donor countries. Moreover, importantly, all three of these 'poor cousin' goals and targets are related to supporting measures to increasing the productive capacity of national economies, which was neglected in the heavy emphasis on "basic needs" encoded in the MDGs priorities.

Table 2. Development Assistance Committee Bilateral Commitments by Sector (2011 USD millions)			
Major categories of Sector Allocable Aid and selected subcategories	Average 1995-2000	Average 2001-2006	Average 2007-2011
1. Social Infrastructure & Services	15,841.63	30,696.73	46,231.59
Education	3,646.18	7,382.19	9,620.67
Health	2,306.14	4,116.13	5,333.95
STD and HIV Control	410.17	2,137.97	5,716.70
Water Supply & Sanitation	3,558.74	3,800.16	5,884.92
2. Economic Infrastructure & Services	11,844.15	11,517.34	18,192.42
3. Production Sectors	4,936	5,615.55	8,191.59
Agriculture	2,760.01	2,827.68	4,581.53
Food Crop Production	161.40	101.48	244.94
4. Multisector/cross-cutting	4,537.19	6,281.17	10,739.76
5. General Budget Support	2,717.3	2,899.12	2,876.63
OECD. Query Wizard for International Development Statistics. 2012. http://stats.oecd.org/qwids/ (accessed May 2013). Authors' calculations.			

Unintended consequences

The studies collected in the Project revealed many unfortunate consequences of *simplification* that framed development as a process of delivering concrete and measurable outcomes. Several studies found a shift in development thinking during the decade of the 2000s which trended towards meeting basic needs. In turn, this thinking led to strengthened financial support for vertical and technocratic strategies, which represented a shift away from the 1990s and a reversion to 1980s thinking. During the 1990s, much of development economics research concluded that poverty reduction was a process requiring social change, including shifts in power relations. This was consistent with the emergence during the 1990's of a human rights-based approach to development, which focused on people not as the beneficiaries of specific programs but as active agents in changing the social relations and structures that keep them disempowered and perpetuate rights deprivations (OHCHR, 2006; Alston & Robinson, 2003).

For example, the 2000/2001 World Development Report (World Bank, 2000) had concluded that the three strategic means to poverty reduction were empowerment of people, strengthening security against vulnerabilities, and expanding opportunities. Across multiple sectors, the international development conferences of the 1990's adopted broad agendas that explicitly recognized an array of human rights and emphasized the central human rights and human-development concerns of equity/equality in both socio-economic and civil/political spheres, participation of people, and the inter-relatedness of social and economic progress across sectors, such as health, education, and agriculture. As noted in the Project studies, each of the sectoral agendas were incorporated in many conferences. For example, Unterhalter notes that education was an agenda in the Declarations on Women, Children, Health, and Food, among others, while Fukuda-Parr and Orr note that the World Food Summit Declaration incorporated objectives for gender equality, children, health and education.

Empirical/Policy effects

Diverting attention from important objectives and challenges. The process that mobilized attention and support for several goals and targets, also led to marginalizing important objectives that were not included in the MDG framework. Many such objectives were key elements of the internationally agreed agendas that were being implemented even as the MDGs were introduced

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in 2001. For example, Unterhalter's study on Goal 2–to achieve Universal Primary Education – found that this target sidelined other important objectives that were being pursued under the 'Education for All' agenda. That internationally agreed agenda, adopted at the Jomtien, had included quality of education, early childhood education, adult literacy, secondary education, attention to marginalized and vulnerable populations and equity on multiple dimensions, including income, geography and gender. Sen and Mukherjee found Goal 3 – to promote gender equality and empower women – and its targets to be highly reductionist, sidelining all but one of the 13 points of the Beijing Platform for Action. The authors explain the incoherence of reducing a goal of gender equality to targets and indicators focusing only on gender parity in education, informal sector labor force participation, and political participation of women. These narrow targets were a dramatic change from the more transformative understanding of "gender equality" that had emerged from the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women and the civil society movements of the 1990s. Similarly, Yamin and Boulanger found that the Goal 5 target – to reduce the maternal mortality ratio by three quarters[8] – sidelined the broader sexual and reproductive health and rights agenda articulated in the International Conference on Population and Development at Cairo in 1994 (ICPD), and focused on narrow select interventions even within the health sector.

Gibbons and Diaz conclude with respect to Goal 4 – to reduce child mortality – that the framing of this goal 'not only shrunk the child health agenda, but took no account of incipient efforts to embed human rights principles in the pursuit of child survival. MDG 4 was un-tethered from the Millennium Declaration and from the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).' They argue that this undermined the nascent movement to develop a human rights-based approach to child well being, anchored in the CRC. Langford and Winkler likewise argue that Target 7C on water and sanitation, failed to take into account crucial quality, equity and affordability concerns, which would have been part of a framework based upon human rights. Cohen found Target 7D-- achieve a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers -- diverted attention away from the broader economic, social, governance, and environmental goals set by Habit II, the 1996 UN Conference on Human Settlements, and thus failed to address the critical challenges of urbanization including climate change, economic growth and employment creation. Moreover, rather than construing the city as the site for human development, or even economic growth, it narrowly focused on housing structures and bathrooms.

Across the goals and targets studied, inequality and discrimination were almost entirely neglected. Overall, the agendas driven by the goals and targets did not conceptualize the agenda as realization of rights: rights to education, food, health, water and sanitation, and education, sexual and reproductive rights, and rights to equality, including crucially gender equality. Gibbons and Diaz conclude that the MDGs not only de-linked child survival from the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but frustrated the ongoing efforts to build these norms and standards into international efforts.

Silo effect in Programming. Several studies found that the goals/targets encouraged implementation approaches that were conceptually narrow, vertically structured and relied heavily on technological solutions, neglecting the need for social change and the strengthening of national institutions. For example, the hunger target encourages measures to achieve short-term improvements through feeding and nutritional supplements rather than by the broad approach of the 1996 World Food Summit, which identified a broad range of actions needed to expand access to food encompassing support to small-scale farming, nutrition programs, social safety nets and the empowerment of women. This prior agenda had addressed root causes of low birth weight babies, and malnourished children, such as women's lack of voice and education.

Gentilini and Sumner explain how the segmentation of interconnected domains of poverty, such as income poverty, hunger, water, and education, has helped lead to fragmented policy implementation. The authors suggest that a multi-sectoral approach would be more likely to deliver sustainable human development than this segmented approach. Yamin and Boulanger write that in areas of maternal and child health, funding over the last decade has overwhelmingly supported vertical approaches to such activities as vaccine programs and skilled birth attendance, at the expense of support to national systems. It was also a result of political choices and strategic alliances that the vast increase in HIV programming generally did not lead to integration with reproductive health.

Normative/Knowledge effects

In addition to the empirical effects on specific sectors, the studies confirm that the MDGs have had enormous communicative power. Once the goals were defined and the targets set, they began to shape the way that development was understood-- but with dramatically reductionist

consequences for how development and poverty were construed. For example, Sen and Mukherjee argue that gender equality in primary and secondary education began to epitomize the notion of gender equality and empowerment. Such a limited understanding characterized thinking of earlier decades before the advances in the 1990s, which highlighted dimensions of agency and human rights, and advanced an understanding of gender equality as a process of shifting power relations between men and women, which affects multiple spheres of life, not merely equal achievement in meeting certain basic needs.

Yet the essence of the MDGs is that they frame the concept of development as a set of basic needs outcomes, rather than as a process of transformative change in economic, social and political structures. While gender equality is a valuable end in itself, it is also instrumentally important as a means to achieve other goals. The studies on maternal health, child survival, and household food security found that a broad understanding of gender equality – encompassing access to employment as well as social services, as well as freedoms from coercion and violence in both public and private spheres – was emphasized in many of the international agendas that were agreed in the 1990s conferences, and which were still being implemented at the time the MDGs were decided. What happened with MDG 5–the goal on improving maternal health – illustrates this well. Yamin and Boulanger argue that this goal reduced the comprehensive and necessarily politically contested, sexual and reproductive health and rights agenda of the ICPD, which was reaffirmed in Beijing, to the relatively depoliticized realm of maternal health MDG 5 defined its target in terms of the principal indicator chosen—Maternal Mortality Ratios—as reducing maternal mortality ratios by 75 percent from 1990 levels. In so doing, MDG 5 marginalized many of the other sexual and reproductive rights issues highlighted in ICPD and focused attention away from the social changes necessary to achieve the ICPD agenda to the idea of achieving a specific outcome measure.

Despite the idiosyncratic nature of the selection of targets and indicators, and the great variability in both ambition as well as data quality, an overarching conclusion of the Project is that once these numerical targets were set, they were perceived to be "value neutral." As they were to be measured through outcomes, the MDGs displaced debates about policy alternatives both in global development broadly, as well as within specific fields. In fact, however, there were assumptions deeply embedded in the MDGs about the nature and purpose of development. The

effect of the MDG framing was to marginalize ongoing strategic processes for empowerment of people and transforming economies, including such central issues to poverty reduction as productive employment and productivity gains of small-scale farmers, as well as issues mentioned earlier such as women's access to reproductive services, and women's political voice. These issues were partially added belatedly. However, they were buried as indicators or targets for goals that were already otherwise defined, such as women's political participation as an indicator for the goal of achieving gender equality in education.

Political dynamics

The MDGs did not arrive onto a blank stage in terms of international development. They built on – but selectively – two sets of ongoing processes that had developed international normative consenses and built alliances across civil society, UN agencies, bilateral donors, multilateral institutions, and national government departments. They built particularly on the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD's alliance of bilateral donors and the IDGs created by that alliance, and on the 1990s development conferences led by an alliance of UN agencies, civil society, and sectoral or theme-specific government departments.

A common finding across the studies was that in many of these cases, the MDGs disrupted these on-going processes for implementation of the conference agendas. This resulted not only from the selective cherry-picking of the broad 1990's agendas but also, in some instances, from the modification of previously-agreed targets. For example, Fukuda-Parr and Orr write that the hunger goal was revised from halving the *number* of people suffering from hunger to halving the *proportion*, or, as Langford and Winkler explain, from universal access to partial access for water. In other cases, the MDGs disrupted nascent initiatives. Van der Hoeven points out that in the area of employment, the ILO had been mounting a broad initiative on decent work. This accounts for the lukewarm reaction to these new goals on the part of some UN agencies which had to integrate them into their existing agendas and did not see much value added.   Sen and Mukherjee note that the MDGs on the global women's movement, which had achieved remarkable successes at the conferences of the 1990's, and Yamin and Boulanger confirm this with regard to the sexual and reproductive rights movement in particular.

It is instructive that the one study that argues for a positive effect of the MDGs on broad-based

civil society mobilization relates to HIV/AIDS treatment – Target 6 to combat global diseases – which was in an area where there was no prior agreed international agenda. The chapter does not examine WHO's reactions with respect to global diseases more broadly. However, there was no contradiction for the new UN organization – UNAIDS – to advocate for an HIV/AIDS target, and to use it in its mobilization campaign. For UNAIDS, the specificity of the target was not a matter of concern. In contrast, studies in this project note that the leadership of the FAO, ILO, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNIFEM, UNFPA, WHO as well as women's organizations, initially did not invest in the process of elaborating the MDGs, believing that their conference agendas were more relevant.

TARGET SETTING AND INDICATOR SELECTION

Methodological criteria: statistical rigour and policy responsiveness

The criteria behind the 2001 MDG framework (United Nations, 2003), those proposed by the Task Team on Lessons Learned from MDG Monitoring of the IAEG-MDG (UN , 2013), and those proposed for the Sustainable Development Goals all focus on: simplicity; measurability; and achievability in setting goals and targets, on statistical criteria for selecting indicators. As the papers in this Project show, however, these criteria are insufficient – and can in fact be in direct conflict with – the policy priorities of fostering development that is equitable and sustainable.

The first set of targets and indicators were guided by statistical criteria with due consideration for the quality and coverage of data series available from recognized sources. In the 2003 report, "Indicators for Monitoring the Millennium Development Goals" (UN, 2003) the UN described the rationale used in selecting the original 48 quantitative indicators. The stated criteria for the selection were: that they provide "relevant and robust measures of progress" towards the MDG targets, that they be "broadly consistent with other global lists," that they be based on international standards, and that they be constructed from well-established data sources, be quantifiable, measurable, and consistent. While it is clearly important for data-based indicators to be quantifiable and measurable, the result was dropping important objectives that are critical to human rights and human development, but as noted above, may be less easy to measure, or for which official statistical data series have not been developed. According to experts involved in

the MDG creation process, the decision that only targets with agreed upon indicators and "robust" data would be included in the goals, with very few exceptions, directly resulted in the exclusion of civil and political rights indicators included in the Millennium Declaration (Vandemoortele 2011). The Declaration's targets such as promoting democracy, inclusive political processes, freedom of the media, minority and migrant rights, combating violence against women, and the "consolidation of democracy in Africa," (UN, 2000) disappeared when the Declaration was "crystallized" (UN, 2005) into the MDGs .

More recently, the UN MDG Task force released a report, "Lessons Learned from Monitoring the MDGs from a Statistical Perspective," acknowledging some of the criticisms of the previously chosen targets and indicators, and outlining what the criteria for indicator selection in 2015 should be (UN, 2013). For example, the infeasibility of some of the targets for many countries has also been a longstanding critique, especially if they are interpreted at the country level. According to one estimate, the average African country would have to achieve 7 percent per capita growth for fifteen years in order to halve poverty; a growth rate that only five countries achieved in the fifteen years before the MDGs (Clemens et al., 2007). The "Lessons Learned" report acknowledges these criticisms, and states, for instance, that the child mortality goal is "not achievable" (UN 2013). This apparently increasingly popular view, however, is not supported by others, who have accused the MDGs of setting the bar too low (Pogge, 2004; see Cohen in this Project).

Another widely shared criticism involves the lack of clarity and inconsistent approach in setting the numeric target. Easterly (2009), for example, has explained that there are several different ways that these targets could have been defined, by absolute or percentage changes, change targets versus level targets, and that they could have been measured by positive or negative indicators. All of these choices have consequences in terms of perceptions, and in terms of how likely a particular country may be to reach a particular target. For example, when the pace of progress, rather than likelihood to achieve the quantitative target, is the criteria for success, African countries perform significantly better (Fukuda-Parr, et al., 2013). The logic behind how these targets, and thus the definition of development success, were chosen was rarely clear. Other critiques acknowledged in the "Lessons Learned" report include the lack of consultation in the selection process and inconsistency between the target and the goal (UN, 2013).

In setting out new criteria, the "Lessons Learned" report suggests that targets should: (i) have clear connections to the goals; (ii) be consistent with goals in other international agreements; (iii) include both absolute and relative changes; (iv) be quantifiable and time bound; (v) be "ambitious but achievable;" and (vi) be set in consultation with country teams. Although these criteria address some of the more superficial criticisms (such as the choice between relative and absolute changes), there does not appear to be any more fundamental change in thinking about targets post 2015 (UN, 2013).

The list of criteria for the indicators reveals a similar pattern. The indicators are to "flow naturally" from the goals and targets, and be relevant to those targets. They should be measurable, possible to disaggregate, clear and easy to understand for policy makers and the public, and "sensitive to policy interventions." It appears that adding "possible to disaggregate" to the list of "measurable, clear and quantifiable" is intended to allow for increased focus on inequalities across the goals, which has been a major critique of the MDGs. The report also argues that "outcome indicators" are preferred to "process indicators," and that "continuity with the current set of indicators is preferable" where possible and relevant. As indicated by the preceding quote, the list of criteria does not represent any major change in approach (UN, 2013).

In another ongoing attempt at goal-setting, the Outcome document of the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) commits to setting sustainable development goals. The criteria for these goals is that they are 'action oriented, concise and easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries, while taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities' (United Nations , 2012). Each of these criteria reflects important principles, as do the proposed criteria of the "Lessons Learned" report, and the criteria used in the original goal setting process. However, many of the criteria also pose serious dilemmas:

Concise and easy to communicate – while conciseness and simplicity were key strengths of the MDGs, this was for the purposes of communicating the urgency of priorities. On the other hand, simplicity is highly reductionist. Simplicity is a criterion used with respect to individual goals as well as the overall framework; simplicity therefore also implies selectivity in the "set of goals"—

i.e., that there cannot be a "Christmas Tree" of goals. A key finding of the Project is that the goals were too simple in both senses. They diverted attention from important priorities that were not included at all or prominently enough among the goals, such as employment and income equality. But, moreover, there are many development priorities that are too complex to reduce into a set of goals.

Measurability – while quantified targeting was another key strength of the MDGs, this again was for the purposes of communicating complex concepts. A key finding of the Project is that many non-measured—and non-measurable-- priorities were sidelined. The human principles of participation, equality, democratic voice and accountability are difficult to measure quantifiably. Yet they are essential for development as a transformative agenda. Yamin and Boulanger point out that in a human rights framework, not all indicators will be quantitative. For example, there could be a time-bound indicator related to the implementation of specific legal protections. A focus on 'measurable' targets distorts agendas, and can divert policy attention from pressing human rights and human development concerns, which require legal, political and institutional changes that are not well-suited to quantifiable measurement.

Concreteness or outcome focus – concrete outcome-focused targets and indicators were effective in achieving consensus on the MDGs as a development framework, and a widely held view argues that the goals should focus on ends, not means. Some argue that the international community should not dictate 'means' to achieving key objectives (Vandemoortele, 2011). But as Caliari points out, the MDGs were not consistent and include means in Goal 8, and in target 6B, for access to HIV/AIDS treatment. There is also lack of clarity in terms of what is meant by 'outcomes'. Further, some important human development concerns may be discarded. Vandemoortele (2011) argues against the inclusion of the "decent work" target because it is "vague," and full employment because it "can't be fully achieved."

In these arguments there is evident confusion about what is meant by 'ends' and 'means'. An important debate in development economics has been on how the key objectives of development should be defined. Many argue that development should ultimately be judged by people's wellbeing, defined as capability expansion or the realization of human rights.   By that definition, income poverty is not an end but is a means as well. Yet development is more than meeting

basic needs. It also requires an enabling environment including economic growth for human flourishing. Agreement amongst states over global economic arrangements should surely be an important part of an international development agenda. As Caliari argues, concessionary flows, equitable trade rules, arrangements for debt reduction are essential aspects of development progress.

In the case of maternal health, Yamin and Boulanger argue, 'process' indicators would be far more appropriate than Maternal Mortality Ratios to reveal whether a government is adopting appropriate measures to realize a fundamental women's health rights on a non-discriminatory basis, as they can be disaggregated and illustrate policy responsiveness. Certain process indicators are susceptible to frequent measure and therefore revealing as to whether specific administrations are progressively realizing economic and social rights. Yamin and Boulanger further note that indicators which depend upon global estimation exercises are particularly poorly adapted to fostering national ownership and participation of the people who are most affected by development programming (see also Yamin and Falb, 2012).

A number of papers underscore that the process of development should be participatory if it is people centered; people are not merely passive beneficiaries of progress but active agents who can voice their concerns and claim their entitlements. While global goals should not become another form of ill-advised prescriptions of one-size-fits all national policies, the notion of 'outcomes' should be expanded to include an enabling economic environment, and processes such as peoples' participation.

Statistical or policy criteria for indicator selection – while the choice of indicators with poor data availability and definitional difficulties have been identified as a weakness of the MDGs, robust statistical criteria may favor indicators that are less responsive to policy priorities. Policy priorities for human development and human rights include equality in both outcomes and opportunities, addressing vulnerability, insecurity, and exclusion, and ensuring meaningful participation, voice and accountability. Metrics more capable of monitoring these dimensions of progress are needed. Indicators that would be more useful are those that are amenable to disaggregation to reveal inter-group disparities and the possible presence of discrimination,

measurement of fluctuations that can capture vulnerability and insecurity, and the potential to advance data creation and collection.

This use of "indicator criteria," such as data availability or measurability, as a "veto" over goal and target selection (Langford, 2012) looks especially troublesome in light of the exclusion of many of the concerns related to human rights and human development in the original MDGs. When the goal and target setting process is explicitly intended to influence the development agenda, immediately ruling out goals – no matter how important – strictly for data-related reasons, it is unacceptable. Further, Langford and Winkler point out that lack of data may not always be unintentional. It may be the case that issue areas that have been underemphasized or marginalized may be precisely the ones for which data is lacking. To then use this lack of data to exclude these issues from the goal setting process is to compound the marginalization. Instead, Langford and Winkler argue, the goal setting process could be used to spur an improvement and expansion of data sets, perhaps most for underemphasized issues (Langford and Winkler). Data availability should be balanced against the ability to improve statistical systems to better measure these concerns relevant to human rights and human development. In short, these are dilemmas in elaborating new goals.

Other types of criteria may produce very different targets. For example, Langford (2012) outlines the following criteria for global targets; the target provides a "boosting effect" that helps bring attention to an issue that is urgent or under-prioritized, it has democratic legitimacy as measured by strong global or national demand for a target, and it is universally applicable, in that all states must contribute some effort to achieve the target. Consistency with international law, and a potential for a focus on equity and equality are other possible criteria mentioned. Langford (2012) also provides a different set of guidelines for indicators. These criteria include: relevance; the indicator is a good proxy for the target, saliency and communicability; the indicator is useful for mobilization, data availability (though if data is not available, it should not be an automatic veto). In addition, they should be action oriented, be useful for monitoring, and be universally applicable to all countries (perhaps with some adjustment for capacity or resources, or starting point). Finally, the indicators should be possible to disaggregate, allowing for a focus on inequality, and, most importantly, should not create "perverse incentives" signaling wrong or unintended actions. For example, Yamin and Boulanger report that some studies provide

evidence of a rise in coercive population control methods that could possibly be connected to attempts at MDG achievement.

Several of the studies in this project suggest additional criteria specific to their subject. For example, Fukuda-Parr and Orr mention the importance of vulnerability in the context of hunger. Vulnerability is equally relevant to many of the other goals, such as poverty. To take vulnerability into account, an indicator of measuring volatility (for example, of prices of food, of employment, of income) may be useful.

However, the response need not be to adopt exactly these criteria, or even to do away with simplicity, measurability and concreteness. Rather, these dilemmas can be addressed by explicitly acknowledging the limitations of global goals. The primary purpose of global goals is to communicate urgent social priorities, to strengthen consensus and to mobilize support. The numeric targets and indicators are tools that can monitor implementation by setting benchmarks. They should not be interpreted as a substitute for a consensus development agenda, as occurred with the MDGs. Indeed, the MDGs were not developed for this purpose. They were introduced in the 2001 Road Map to 'harmonize reporting'. Nevertheless, they came to be interpreted as hard priorities and an international agenda.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the Project do not contradict the consensus assessment of the positive effects of the MDGs in highlighting the importance of poverty reduction, and the focus on human wellbeing as urgent global priorities in the twenty first century. Nonetheless, the power of numbers inherent in these goals produced multiple indirect and often unintended consequences which also deserve attention in light of the construction of a post MDGs development agenda. The collected studies in this Project show that some of the policy effects undermined intended consequences while the knowledge effects created a narrative of development that was strangely alien to the vision of the Millennium Declaration for a people-centered development motivated by universal values of equality, respect for nature, solidarity and freedom.

As instruments of people centered development – for the realization of human rights and human development - the methodology of setting targets and selecting indicators needs to consider more

than statistical criteria. Targets and indicators need to be evaluated for their potential to give information on core human rights and human development priorities in dimensions of equity, participation, transparency and accountability. Selecting indicators on data availability unwittingly creates incentives for policy priorities that neglect dimensions such as distributive consequences, and volatility of outcomes. Tradeoffs between policy relevance and data availability should not systematically favor the latter.

More fundamentally, human rights approaches to development require targets and indicators that are both quantitative and qualitative, as many essential components of human rights cannot be reliably quantified. For example, the existence of legal and policy frameworks that proscribe discrimination along prohibited grounds is essential to ensuring development consistent with a human rights framework. However, some aspects of development consistent with human rights and human development can and should be measured. The experience of the MDGs highlights issues in the selection criteria for such quantitative targets and indicators, which extend beyond statistical considerations to focus on policy responsiveness.

The unintended consequences demonstrate both the limitations of target setting as a policy tool, and the dangers of over-enthusiasm of the powers to transform them into agendas and planning frameworks. Goal setting is a poor methodology for elaborating an international agenda. A simple list of numerical targets cannot articulate an agenda for a complex process, such as sustainable, inclusive development. Nor is such a process neutral. By attempting to elaborate an entire international agenda through numerical targeting, simplification, reification and abstraction of quantification created perverse effects in the MDGs. The post-2015 development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals need to go beyond "finishing the agenda of the MDGs" and beyond setting goals and targets. A transformative future development agenda requires a qualitative statement of objectives, visionary norms and priority action needed to achieve the objectives, including legal, policy and global institutional considerations. Exercises in setting global goals and targets and indicators should be embedded in a narrative of development that supports human dignity and capabilities and which is tethered to the international human rights framework.

List of Case studies

1. Goal 1 Target 1A: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day – "Setting an Income Poverty Goal After 2015." - Ugo Gentilini (World Food Programme, Rome) and Andy Sumner (King's College, London).

2. Goal 1 Target 1.B: Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people – "The inclusion of Full Employment in MDG1, What lessons for a post-2015 Development Agenda?" Rolph van der Hoeven (Institute of Social Studies, The Hague)

3. Goal 1 Target 1.C: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger – "The MDG Hunger Target and the Contested Visions of Food Security." Sakiko Fukuda-Parr and Amy Orr (The New School, New York)

4. Goal 2: Achieve Primary Target 2.A: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling – "Education targets, indicators and a post-2015 development agenda: Education for All, the MDGs, and human development." Elaine Unterhalter (Institute of Education, London)

5. Goal 3 Promote gender equality and empower women: Target 3A Target 3.A: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015 – "No Empowerment without Rights, No Rights without Politics: Gender-Equality, the MDGs and the Post 2015 Development Agenda." Gita Sen /DAWN (Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore) and Avanti Mukherjee (University of Massachusetts, Amherst)

6. Goal 4 Target 4.A: Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate – "The Questionable Power of the Millennium Development Goal to Reduce Child Mortality." Elizabeth Gibbons (Harvard School of Public Health, Boston) and Elisa Diaz-Martinez (St. Edwards University, Austin)

7. Goal 5: Improve maternal health; Target 5A Reduce by three quarters between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio - "Taking Measure of the Elephant in the Room: Sexual and reproductive health and rights, MDG 5, and where we want to go from here." Alicia Ely Yamin and Vanessa Boulanger (Harvard School of Public Health, Boston and Dar es Salaam)

8. Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; Target 6.A: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS - "MDG 6: AIDS and the International Health Agenda." Nicoli Nattrass (University of Cape Town, Cape Town)

9. Target 7.D: By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers – "The City is Missing in the Millennium Development Goals: Where is the City?" Michael Cohen (New School, New York)

10. Target 7.C: Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation – "Quantifying Water and Sanitation in Development Cooperation: Power or Perversity?" Malcolm Langford (University of Oslo, Oslo) and Inga Winkler (German Institute for Human Rights, Berlin)

11. Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development – "Analysis of Millennium Development Goal 8: A global partnership for development." Aldo Caliari (Rethinking Bretton Woods Project, Center of Concern, Washington D.C.)

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[1] For a review of this literature, see Fukuda-Parr 2012, Nayyar 2013, UN 2012

[2] The Project is an independent research initiative that arose out of a shared concern amongst the participating scholars with the need to more fully understand the consequences of the MDGs. We gratefully acknowledge the collaboration and support from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Development Programme, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, and the Dag Hammarsjkold Foundation.

[3] See particularly Davis and others (Davis, Kinsbury, Merry, & Fisher, 2012). This is further elaborated in the Project concept paper by Fukuda-Parr (2013)

[4] For use of capabilities approach as evaluative framework, see (Robeyns), and for human rights approach see OHCHR (2006)

[5] Vizard and others 2012 provides a synthetic overview of the literature on the overlaps between capabilities and human rights as frameworks for development policy and evaluation.

[6] In 1996, the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) published a policy document, '*Shaping the Twenty First Century: The Contribution of Development Co-operation'* and a set of

6 goals. The purpose of this document and the goals was to revitalize support for development amongst the 'publics and parliaments' in the donor countries. This was important as political support had waned with the end of the Cold War and development assistance budgets declined over the 1990s. See Hulme (Hulme, 2009)

[7] Income poverty declined rapidly and the target has already been met as a global aggregate. However, this 'progress' must be seen in the light of the fact that much of the gains are accounted for by China. World Total without China would not be on track to achieving the 2015 target.

[8] Initially the only target until the second target of universal access to reproductive health services was added in 2005, and the respective indicators were added in 2007.