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***The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs):  
A Short History of the World's Biggest Promise***

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## **Abstract**

This paper provides a chronological account of the evolution of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It examines their historical antecedents; the UN conferences and summits that provided their content; the role of OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in formulating the International Development Goals (IDGs); the influence of the UN's Secretariat in drafting the Millennium Declaration; and the final negotiations between the UN, DAC, World Bank, and IMF to amend the IDGs into the MDGs in 2001. This account reveals the complexity and unpredictability of global policy-making processes. Although the overarching structures of economic and political power framed all negotiations, so the MDGs are largely a rich world product for rich world audiences, there are opportunities for norm entrepreneurs and message entrepreneurs to exercise personal agency. As the time approaches for the assessment of the MDGs, at the UN General Assembly in September 2010, it is useful to reflect on the 'chaos of accidents and purposes' that generated the MDGs in the first place.

**Keywords:** Millennium Development Goals, Global Public Policy, UN, Global Poverty, Foreign Aid, Development Finance

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## **List of abbreviations**

DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
FFD	Finance for Development
GNI	Gross National Income
HLM	High level meeting (usually of ministers)
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
ICTs	Information Communication Technologies
IDGs	International Development Goals
IFIs	International Financial Institutions
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PRSPs	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	US Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development
WTO	World Trade Organisation

'The end of extreme poverty is at hand – within our generation...[t]here already exist a bold set of commitments that is halfway to that target: the Millennium Development Goals...are bold but achievable...[t]hey represent a crucial midstation on the path to ending extreme poverty by the year 2025' (Sachs, 2005: 25).

'The setting of utopian goals means aid workers will focus efforts on infeasible tasks, instead of the feasible tasks that will do some good' (Easterly, 2006: 20).

'I do not believe in the MDGs. I think of them as a Major Distracting Gimmick... ' (Antrobus, 2003).

## **1 Introduction**

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are the world's biggest promise – a global agreement to reduce poverty and human deprivation at historically unprecedented rates through collaborative action. They differ from all other global promises for poverty reduction in their comprehensive nature and the systematic efforts taken to finance, implement and monitor them. While the MDGs have a warm aura around them – '[t]hey envelop you in a cloud of soft words and good intentions and moral comfort' (Saith, 2006: 1167) – there are fierce debates in academic and professional circles about their value. These range from the high modernists, who take them at face value and are optimistic that they are a blueprint for the transformation of the human condition (Sachs, 2005); the strategic realists, who don't believe the MDGs are a blueprint for action but believe they are essential to stretch ambitions and mobilise political commitment and public support (Fukuda-Parr, 2008); the critics, who see them as well-intentioned but poorly thought through – distracting attention from more appropriate targets (or non-targets) and more effective policies and actions (Clemens et al, 2007; Easterly, 2006); through to the radical critics, who view them as a conspiracy obscuring the really important 'millennial' questions of growing global inequality, alternatives to capitalism and women's empowerment (Antrobus, 2003; Eyben, 2006; Saith, 2006).

While these viewpoints reach dramatically different conclusions about the MDGs, they all share a similar approach. All take the MDGs as a given and then, through vastly different analytical frameworks, make projections about their potential outcomes and consequences. In this paper I take a quite different approach. Rather than focusing on the content of the MDGs and their future impacts, I focus on the processes that led to the specification and agreement on the MDGs and explore the implications of an historical analysis of the MDG story. Examining these processes is fundamental to understanding

why the MDGs have their present content and structure,<sup>1</sup> and may offer practical insights to those involved in MDG implementation or seeking to influence future global megapromises (and there will be more of them).

To do this I use an analytical framework from the emerging field of 'global public policy' that has recently developed within the literature on policy making. This seeks to integrate theoretical elements of the fields of globalisation and public policy (Reinecke, 1998; Stone, 2008). From the globalisation literature, it draws mostly from ideas about 'global governance'. However, the bulk of that literature focuses on critiques of, and proposals for redesigning, regional and global institutions. Commonly it has a normative orientation and strives to identify how global institutions can be made more accountable and, sometimes, how the broader social democratic agenda can be advanced. By contrast, a public policy approach can take a more descriptive perspective, looking at the ambiguous and dynamic links between actors and examining the '...chaos of purposes and accidents...' (Clay and Schaffer, 1984) that, alongside deeper structural forces, shapes policy processes such as the evolution of the MDGs. Beneath the public documents, pronouncements and presentations that present policy as a smoothly functioning machine, this approach seeks to explain the complexity and contingency of what really happens. Through this it permits a deeper understanding of the tensions involved in pursuing internationalism in a system based on the concept of national sovereignty.

Three elements of the public policy literature are particularly important, drawn from two different traditions within this field – 'the science of muddling through' (Lindblom, 1959; Clay and Schaffer, 1984) and discourse analysis (Foucault, 1972). First, the evolution of public policy should be conceptualised as incremental and focused around on-going processes of negotiation and bargaining and a search for compromise. Such negotiations are always multiple and overlapping. The agency of different actors (particularly leaders and 'policy entrepreneurs') or coalitions of actors shapes outcomes, as can the timing of accidental or programmed 'trigger events'. As Keeley and Scoones (2003: 34) express it: '...often serendipity, contingency and chance are important elements in policy change'.

Second, the webs of power that underpin the practice of policy making seek to mobilise support through a legitimising discourse, '...by taking what is essentially a political

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<sup>1</sup> It is also important to do this to understand decision making around poverty reduction, as scholars who focus on specific institutions involved in this story often fail to understand the big differences in specifications of poverty and poverty reduction. For example, Peterson's (2006) study of the UN General Assembly and Schechter's (2001) study of UN global conferences, both a key parts of the MDG story, erroneously report that the MDG list was included in the Millennium Declaration – that is not the case and the final MDGs still had further negotiations to proceed through.

problem...and recasting it in the neutral language of science' (ibid: 23). Policy 'narratives' are important, as they are repeated in an effort to persuade audiences of the rightness of a particular policy. The language, metaphors, symbols and forms in which policy is presented are important resources.<sup>2</sup>

Third, both the 'muddling through' and the discourse traditions argue against the rational and linear model of policy as 'decision-making' (Simon, 1957) that planners, civil servants and politicians often present to the public as the policy process. The presentation of policies as emerging out of this linear-rational process is itself an important element of discourse.

Stone (2008) has mustered many of these ideas together in a recent paper building on the work of Nowotny et al (2001: 206) and their use of the Ancient Greek concept of *agora* – the marketplace and public square where social, economic and political life came together. She proposes that the concept of a 'global *agora*' can push forward the understanding of global public policy. The global agora is characterised by:

...fluid, dynamic and intermeshed relations of politics, markets, culture and society. This public [social and political] space is shaped by the interactions of its actors. Some actors are more visible, persuasive or powerful than others. The irregular distribution of institutions and networks is also evident...a domain of relative disorder and uncertainty where institutions are underdeveloped and political authority unclear, and dispersed through multiple institutions and networks...policy activity is opaque and as likely to take place inside private associations among non-state actors as in inter-governmental conferences (Stone, 2008: 21).

The global agora provides a valuable image of the inherently complex, messy and unpredictable processes that incrementally, sometimes by design and sometimes by accident, gave birth to the MDGs. Institutions and ideas interact within the global agora and, on occasion, reframe social issues. In this case the issue of 'international development' was eventually reframed as 'global poverty eradication'.

My approach moves beyond the narrow analysis of the MDGs that has dominated the literature – the scorecards of potential achievement or failure that surround individual goals and/or the entire set.<sup>3</sup> Instead, it views them as a particular moment in a longer-term process of trying to promote the reduction of poverty and human deprivation as a global value that shapes individual, group, organisational, national and international

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<sup>2</sup> An outstanding example is Gordon Brown (2002) using two grand historical success stories in a single title - *Tackling Poverty: A Global New Deal – A Modern Marshall Plan for the Developing World*. London: HM Treasury.

<sup>3</sup> See the annual UN *Millennium Development Goals Reports*, World Bank *Global Monitoring Reports*, and UNESCO *EFA Global Monitoring Reports*.

behaviours and actions. The MDGs are not a final product to be praised or revised or put aside. Rather, they are work in progress that is influencing and will influence future global mega-promises. At the same time as we struggle with how to assist poor people to improve their lives through MDG implementation<sup>4</sup> we also need to think about how to shape global goals, global visions and global promises in the future.

The paper unfolds as follows. The empirical account of the creation of the MDGs is divided into nine sections. The first (Section 2.1) examines the antecedents to the MDGs, particularly the key summits of the 1990s that fed into the creation of the MDGs and from which many of the Goals originate. The second section looks at the move within the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to compile a list of International Development Goals (IDGs). Section 2.3 examines the reactions to this enterprise, before Section 2.4 focuses on the key interaction between the IDGs and the UN. Section 2.5 examines the role of Clare Short in the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and the Utstein Group in propelling the IDGs into greater prominence and securing support for them. Section 2.6 examines the project undertaken within the UN to compile a set of development goals to be included in the Millennium Declaration, before Section 2.7 looks at the interaction between these two processes being undertaken within the DAC and the UN. Sections 2.8 and 2.9 examine how this twin track process was brought together to create one set of MDGs. The final section draws some lessons from the evolution of the MDGs and argues that those involved in discussions about 'what comes after the MDG?' would be well-advised to think about the processes, as well as the content, of global promises.

## **2 Making the world's biggest promise: THE MDG story**<sup>5</sup>

### **2.1 Antecedents**

The MDGs are not the first time that global promises have been made about eradicating or rapidly reducing human deprivation. Antecedents can be found stretching back to President Franklin D. Roosevelt's 'Four Freedoms'<sup>6</sup> speech of January 1941 and to the *Declaration of Human Rights* of 1948 and its stipulation that 'Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family,

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<sup>4</sup> This includes all options from whole-hearted implementation of Millennium Project type initiatives (UN Millennium Project, 2005) to abandonment of the idea of setting global goals.

<sup>5</sup> A shorter version of this history, focused on the influence of the ideas of human development and results-based management, can be found in Hulme (2008).

<sup>6</sup> 'The third freedom is freedom from want – which translated into universal terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants – everywhere in the world.'

including food, clothing, housing and medical care...' (UN *Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 25). The 1960s were declared unanimously in the General Assembly to be the first UN Development Decade, sparking off a rash of target setting (Toye and Toye, 2005a and 2005b), but enthusiasm to set targets ran ahead of commitment to action. Processes for monitoring targets and mechanisms for producing plans of action were not created and the results often fell far short of the rhetoric. A common pattern of behaviour can be observed at many summits<sup>7</sup> – education, food, small islands, drugs. First, national ministers declare a grand goal. Subsequently this goal has some general influence on activity but it is not systematically pursued. At the next UN summit or conference, the minister (or his/her successor) agrees to the same or a reduced goal for a later date.<sup>8</sup>

The 1980s saw the stalling of global summitry and goal-setting, and a dramatic change in the global intellectual environment. The UN's influence waned, while that of the IMF and World Bank increased as they imposed structural adjustment policies on the increasing numbers of poor countries coming to them for loans. The Bank and Fund imposed a recipe of liberalisation, privatisation and reduced government to 'get the prices right', leading to what many have seen as development's 'lost decade'. Towards the end of the 1980s, more and more evidence began to emerge that structural adjustment and the associated conditionalities were not delivering on the promise of growth and prosperity and that the fiscal restraint they called for were damaging education, health and other essential services (Cornia et al, 1987; Mosley et al, 1995). This was particularly true in Africa and Latin America. Political space began to open up for those with alternatives to structural adjustment, and in the 1990s UN summitry returned.

With the wisdom of hindsight 1990 can be seen as a pivotal year. Against the backdrop of the end of the Cold War three influential 'events' happened in the world of development ideas to bring poverty in from the cold. The first was the World Bank's *World Development Report 1990*, which reviewed poverty reduction and indicated that poverty was now a rehabilitated concept, having previously been marginalised within the Bank. Alongside this the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) published the first *Human Development Report*, which amplified the message that poverty was on the agenda and made the case for a broad-based conceptualisation of poverty and poverty reduction. Policies needed to pursue ends (improved lives) and not just means (economic growth).

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<sup>7</sup> The health goals seem to have had much more systematic influence on policy and practice and in terms of impacts.

<sup>8</sup> Jolly (2003) and Clemens (2004: 38-39) have listings of the major events and the goals/targets that were agreed.



The third 'event' was the re-activation of UN Summits and Conferences,<sup>9</sup> with four such meetings held in 1990: the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien), the UN World Summit for Children, the UNCTAD Conference on the Least Developed Countries and a Conference on Drug Problems. While Jomtien appears to have followed the established model of Ministers of Education waxing lyrical about extending primary education for all by 2000 and then flying off, the 'Children's Summit' broke the pattern. UNICEF not only advanced an agenda for improving the lives of the world's children, but re-energised the process of summiteering and '...in several respects, provided the model for subsequent summits' (Emmerij, Jolly and Weiss, 2001:112). The Children's Summit provided evidence that successful summits could generate political commitment and additional financial resources. Bradford (2002: 4) writes that '[t]he development of the MDGs has its roots in the World Summit for Children in 1990'. The summit set specific goals for infant, under-five and maternal mortality, universal access to and completion of primary education, improvements in adult literacy, reduction in malnutrition and universal access to safe water and sanitary services.

The image of deprived children was an ideal vehicle for driving forward poverty reduction as only the curmudgeonly find it possible to publicly declare objections to child advancement. Jim Grant, UNICEF's then Executive Director, along with UNICEF colleagues and social activists, also set in motion serious implementation and monitoring processes in an attempt to maintain the momentum behind the summit Declaration. He travelled around the world asking national leaders what progress they were making. His UNICEF field staff were tasked with promoting governments to develop and implement serious plans and this was highly successful: 'some 155 countries submitted national programs of action and over 100 countries conducted monitoring surveys' (Schechter, 2005:114). Observers – at the UN, national governments, aid agencies, NGOs, advocacy groups – saw that UN summits and international conferences could be effective vehicles for achieving debates, declarations or decisions that could ensure that an issue received global attention and could place it on agenda for action.

The next major meeting was the *United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*, known as the 'Earth Summit' or 'Rio Summit'. This was successful in mobilising public attention on environment and development but failed in its grander objective of reaching a global consensus on issues such as climate change and deforestation (see Emmerij et al, 2001: 89-95). The Rio Summit was one of the events at

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<sup>9</sup> These involve the UN General Assembly agreeing that an ad hoc conference should be convened to look at an issue of particular international importance. A temporary secretariat is established, headed by a secretary-general, often from outside the UN system (Emmerij, Jolly and Weiss, 2001:81). The secretariat convenes a series of preparatory meetings, often in different parts of the world. It consults with experts and NGOs as well as member states. These conferences produce final declarations and plans of action. In the 1990s follow-up and monitoring activities strengthened considerably. Many conferences have follow up meetings to review progress five and ten years later.

which the women's movement began to hone its lobbying skills and greatly strengthen the impact it could have on UN conference declarations. Over the next few years the movement was an unofficial but major player at such gatherings and utilised mechanisms such as the 'women's caucus' and 'feminist Prepcoms' (Chen, 1995). It was followed in December 1992 by the International Conference on Food and Nutrition in Rome. This had a much lower public profile and appears to have followed the earlier conference pattern, with unanimous commitments to 'freedom from hunger' but little systematic follow-up. However, one of the targets it set, halving the number of hungry people in the world, would come to prominence in the MDGs. The World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993 re-affirmed the commitment of UN members to human rights and fundamental freedoms and set off the process leading to the establishment of the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights. In terms of the MDGs it reaffirmed the principles that underpin them but, by the very nature of the human rights discourse, it is broad and comprehensive. The economic and managerial concepts that underpin the MDGs – prioritising some goals over others and accepting that achievement may take many years – is alien to the legal and philosophical argumentation behind human rights approaches.

Next came the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) at Cairo in 1994, an important event for the MDG process. Like the Earth Summit, this was a programmed event following on from the 1974 and 1984 UN conferences, but it was given extraordinary energy by its chair, Dr Nafis Sadik, the Director of UNFPA and a lifelong advocate for family planning. However, the inclusion of 'development' in its title, for the first time, indicated that it planned to move on from the earlier agenda. The ICPD discussions proved to be much broader than the previous conferences, which had assumed that population control was the priority goal and had concentrated on demography and family planning. At Cairo debates became heated, as many delegates adopted rights-based approaches promoting the ideas of sexual and reproductive health and women's empowerment. Roman Catholics and conservative Christians and Muslims were concerned that explicitly and/or implicitly feminists and liberals were arguing for women's right to abortion.<sup>10</sup> As will be seen below (and more fully in Hulme, 2009) this area of contention would resurface throughout the process of drafting the MDGs.

1995 was the peak year for summitry, with the World Summit on Social Development (Copenhagen) in March and the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing only six months later. Eyben's (2006: 598) summary of Copenhagen as '... an agenda for market friendly state intervention ... the inspiration of officials and diplomats ... a venue for recapturing the ideological ground established by Third World countries through their membership of the UN and lost to the neoliberal agenda ...' seems a fair judgement.

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<sup>10</sup> The representative for Iran argued that 'women's pivotal role in determining population trends should not be exploited for the recognition of immoral behaviour or for undermining religious and ethical values' (cited in Emmerij et al, 2001:97).

With an unprecedented 117 heads of state and government attending the Summit, the final declaration was never going to be radical, but it did have exceptional legitimacy.<sup>11</sup> The World Summit on Social Development was the idea of Juan Somavia (the future Director-General of the ILO). Schechter (2005:140), a long-term observer of UN conferences, writes that: ‘...Somavia succeeded in convening a conference designed as a kind of synthesis of all that preceded it’. It was structured around three pillars – poverty reduction (from a multi-dimensional perspective), employment and social integration – but it was the first of these that dominated discussion. Indeed, the UNDP (1997:108) refers to Copenhagen as ‘...a giant step forward...with the new political commitment to eradicate poverty’. Many NGOs applauded the focus on poverty and the multi-sectoral approach proposed. The Declaration included poverty eradication and employment creation, and reaffirmed earlier declarations on education and gender equality. However, more radical NGOs felt that the Summit failed to challenge the consequences of economic globalisation. In their view it tackled the symptoms and not the causes of poverty. As a result they drafted an alternative declaration – what the Summit should have recommended (see Emmerij et al, 2001: 115). The NGOs’ concern that the declaration was not radical enough, and the related concerns that the declaration was non-binding, should not obscure the evidence of impacts in a relatively short period of time. The UNDP soon restructured its programmes so that poverty reduction was their overarching goal and the UN declared an International Year for the Eradication of Poverty in 1996 (this became a decade the next year). While the Social Development Summit may not have achieved binding goals for poverty eradication, it clearly had a profound impact on multilateral and some bilateral programmes, which increasingly began to define their developmental role as poverty eradication or reduction.<sup>12</sup>

Beijing was an altogether different affair. Eyben (2006: 600) interprets it as ‘... not just another UN conference ... it was a conference that represented a movement ... arguably the moment that the transformational approach to gender relations had the greatest chance’. The energy and drive released at the conference, however, was not reflected by its ultimate impact on global targeting exercises. As discussed later, its relatively radical agenda of transformation worried conservative interests; it did not engage with economists, who are the dominant technical analysts of development policy; and its focus on rights and social relations does not lend itself to goal setting and performance management.

After this peak in 1995 the UN summits continued – with the Second UN Conference on Human Settlements (known as Habitat II) in Istanbul and the World Food Summit in Rome in 1996. However, ‘... despite significant progress in each conference ... there was a sense of overload, over engagement and summit fatigue with too many

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<sup>11</sup> A noticeable absentee was President Clinton. American reticence about the UN's social development agenda, then and now, was not confined to Republican constituencies.

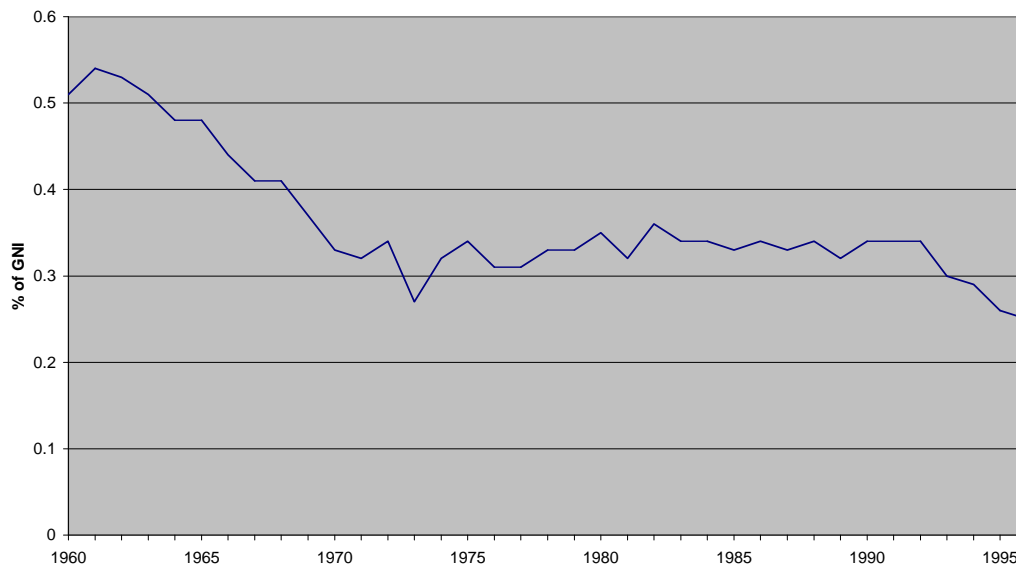
<sup>12</sup> Also see Schechter (2005:141).

recommendations on too many subjects ...' (Bradford, 2002: 4).<sup>13</sup> The agora/locus for global target-setting was about to shift from the vast and diverse UN jamborees that moved from continent to continent to much smaller, formalised meetings – mainly of men from industrialised countries – in Paris, at the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC).

## 2.2 From summit declarations to lists of targets: The DAC takes the lead

National leaders and ministers were making grand promises at global summits in the mid-1990s, but aid agencies around the world had a big problem. With only a few exceptions, their budgets as a share of GNI were in decline and total levels of official development assistance (ODA) were in long-term decline (see Chart 1 below). The right-wing governments in power in many industrialised countries placed a low priority on aid. Even Clinton, the newly elected Democrat President of the US, was committed to a '... number one priority...' of reducing the US fiscal deficit (Clinton, 2005: 733) and foreign aid had to share the cuts. The Cold War was over, so there was no need to use foreign aid to buy allies in poor countries. The global 'peace dividend' promised in 1990, with armaments turned into ploughshares, was a dishonoured memory.

Chart 1 ODA from DAC countries as percentage of GNI, 1960-1996



Source: DAC International Development Statistics, <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats>.

<sup>13</sup> I had personal evidence of this. Friends working in major UK NGOs who had welcomed the opportunities the summits and conferences had created began to question their resource demands and relevance at this time. There were concerns that participating in a summit tied up lots of advocacy resources and that any agency was unlikely to be heard much in such a cacophony.

For the donor club, the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC),<sup>14</sup> declining aid budgets were a particular problem. Ministers of International Development or Development Cooperation found themselves increasingly marginalised and the bureaucrats heading aid agencies found themselves engaged in the thankless tasks of defending their organisations and downsizing. The environment for aid was not propitious. Critics on the right, and especially Jesse Helms in the US,<sup>15</sup> were arguing aid was a waste of time. On the left, aid had a negative image after the experience of structural adjustment. The atmosphere at the Chateau de la Muette where the DAC was holding its high level meeting (HLM) on 3-4 May 1995 was gloomy, with many delegates talking about 'aid fatigue' and lack of public support for long-term development.<sup>16</sup>

At the meeting the delegates approved a document that had been produced over the last year, *Development Partnership in the New Global Context* (DAC, 1995a). Building on a review of the achievements of aid, it argued that development cooperation is an investment, rather than an expenditure, that successful strategies could be identified, that poorer countries lacked the resources to promote job-creating growth and social cohesion, and that rich countries needed to increase aid, make it more effective and efficient and make their overall approach to development more coherent. This was a competent document, but it did little to change the mood of the meeting. As each delegate offered their praise for the document many also offered their support to the European Union's proposal (under the French Presidency) '...to set up a *Groupe de Réflexion* with a view to review the future of development aid and the role of the DAC' (DAC, 1995b: 8). Jan Pronk, the highly-respected Netherlands Minister for International Development, took up this point but he argued that this '... should be a *Groupe de Réflexion* at the political level, and not an expert group' (ibid: 31). This reflected his concern that DAC had '...a plethora of activities being taken on by the experts, and not so many discussions among the leaders of agencies, ministers, and those who are politically responsible' (ibid). Colin Bradford, the US representative, followed Pronk. He offered enthusiastic support and spoke of the need for '...reinforcing the capacity of the DAC at the political level...', as this might '...make a difference in translating substantive work into political and policy action' (ibid: 31-32).

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<sup>14</sup> The DAC is a subsidiary body of the OECD. It comprises of a committee, of the representatives of its member governments, and a secretariat to service the committee. Its highest level of decision making is its council, comprised of the Ministers for International Development (or their equivalent). However, for historical reasons the DAC has more autonomous standing than any of the other OECD committees. It has a permanent Chair, who can express his/her opinions without gaining the approval of the OECD Council. The DAC secretariat is based in Paris and had 30 staff in the early 2000s.

<sup>15</sup> At that time I had dinner with one of USAID's 'counsellors' from the HR Department. She joked that she'd be 'the last out of the door' as demand for counselling support at the downsizing and demoralised agency was growing exponentially.

<sup>16</sup> For example, '...Lady Chalker [the UK's Minister for Overseas development]...deplored the fact that she received 95 percent of her publicity for 15 percent of her budget, i.e. the share spent on humanitarian activities' (DAC, 1995b:7).

The meeting ended with support for the idea of a *Groupe de Réflexion*, but with no plan for its implementation (Bradford, 2006: 2). At this point, serendipity intervened. As Bradford crossed the car park to travel home Jan Pronk was pulling out. Bradford had known Pronk since the 1980s and waved for him to stop. Through the car window he asked Pronk whether it would be a good idea to bring the development ministers who had just attended the meeting back to Paris for the annual OECD ministerial meetings, scheduled for 23-24 May, to launch the *Groupe de Réflexion*. Pronk agreed, so Bradford turned around and went back to the Chateau to talk to Jim Michel. Michel, who was to become a keen supporter of this initiative, thought about this and agreed.

Three weeks later the *Groupe de Réflexion* was launched at a breakfast meeting of the OECD ministerial event. The *Groupe* did not yet have a big idea, but it understood that it needed to come up with something that would appeal to politicians, would be understood and supported by OECD publics and would contain a vision of the future that would mobilise action. The *Groupe* met several times over the next year to discuss ideas and drafts. It was supported by staff from the DAC secretariat. One task allocated to these 'junior bureaucrats' was to draw up a list of the declarations agreed at UN summits and see if these could be pulled together into something more coherent.<sup>17</sup> This listing became an important focus for the *Groupe's* drafts. It is important to note the quite different cultural context of DAC *Groupe* meetings compared to UN summits. The DAC meetings were of small numbers of people, did not involve 'shadowing' or 'lobbying' from NGOs and social activists, and fell within DAC frames of reference – aid, transfers and resource constraints (rather than ignoring costs), projects, policies and programmes (rather than rights and principles). The idea of setting targets had become a common device for reforms in public services (based on ideas from 'results-based managements') and it appealed to the US, UK, Germany and Norway, which had begun to use 'logical frameworks' in their aid programmes. However, the listing exercise led to debates amongst *Groupe* members about what should and should not be included. Three particular topics of negotiation had important impacts on what would evolve into DAC's International Development Goals (IDGs).

The first concerned the enthusiasm of the UK and Japanese members, under the direction of their governments, for a focus on income poverty reduction<sup>18</sup> (through economic growth). They argued that a focus on a single goal would be better than a long list of goals aimed at multi-dimensional poverty reduction. On the UK side this appears to have reflected the ruling Conservative Party's orientation towards market-based growth as the provider of welfare and the relative power of economists as advisers to the

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<sup>17</sup> Paul Nielson, the DAC delegate for Denmark, had suggested at the 1995 DAC HLM that '...a better framework for international cooperation and political discussion is needed. This framework must encompass recommendations for all the UN conferences and must be established from within the UN system...' (DAC, 1995b:15).

<sup>18</sup> Interviews with Colin Bradford and Phil Evans.

country's Overseas Development Administration. For the Japanese, this reflected a similar focus on growth and also concerns about the gender equality and women's empowerment thrust that came out of Beijing.<sup>19</sup> The US delegates argued against this as 'poverty' was not a popular concept for politicians or the public in the US. More concrete goals, such as getting children into school and stopping children and mothers from dying, were what they needed. Going for a broad set of goals would give the list a form of democratic legitimacy, as it was derived from numerous UN summits. It had an additional benefit: it would enlist the support of vast numbers of NGOs – environmental, health, education, children, water and sanitation, gender – as most NGOs would see one of their organisational priorities within a longer listing. The DAC was well aware of the growing influence of NGOs on policymakers and public opinion.<sup>20</sup> NGOs made good allies and bad enemies.<sup>21</sup> In the end a compromise was reached: the DAC document would be a listing but it would be headed by 'economic well-being'. This goal would focus on a global goal for income poverty reduction,<sup>22</sup> and the 'social development' goals would be subsumed under a single heading. As a result the narrow, moneymetric view of poverty reduction heads a list of three mega-goals – economic, social and environmental.

The second issue demanding detailed negotiations concerned the gender equality and empowerment goals, which were not agreed until the final meeting of the all-male *Groupe* in April 1996. The Japanese government was concerned about this and negotiated a watering down of the Beijing Declaration. The final wording sought only 'progress toward gender equality and the empowerment of women' and targeted only the education sector.

The third issue concerns a UN Summit goal that failed to enter the IDG listing. The 20/20 initiative proposed in the *Human Development Report 1992* and agreed at the World Summit on Social Development (WSSD) in 1995 was notably absent from the DAC document. This called on national governments in developing countries to allocate 20 percent of their public expenditure to basic social services and on aid donors to match this by allocating 20 percent of aid budgets to these services. It was argued that this would ensure the resources were available for universal coverage in primary education, primary health care, nutrition support programmes and safe water and sanitation. The reasons why 20/20 'fell off the list' are not clear. Certainly the UK government, and ODA economists, were concerned about the setting of an arbitrary input target. Allocating 20

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<sup>19</sup> This position changed a few months later when the Japanese government, keen to take on a greater international role, commissioned work to produce a UNDP listing of development goals.

<sup>20</sup> At this time environmental NGOs were becoming very powerful in development debates in Washington DC. They were very effective at mobilising votes in Congress.

<sup>21</sup> Preston's era at the World Bank had ended in a cloud amplified by NGO action. The new President, James Wolfensohn, had launched a charm offensive with NGOs.

<sup>22</sup> WSSD had agreed country specific targets but the IDGs set the level at 'a reduction by one-half in the proportion of people living in poverty in 2015'.

percent of a national budget to basic services might be too much in some countries and too little in others.<sup>23</sup>

Following intense last minute negotiations, the final document *Shaping the 21st Century: The Contribution of Development Co-operation* was launched at the High Level Meeting of Ministers of Development Cooperation of 6-7 May 1996. This document and event was immediately successful in terms of attracting media attention in Europe and the US. The *International Herald Tribune* ran a front page story under the headline 'Richest Outline a Plan to Help World's Poorest' and summarised the document as '...an ambitious 20-year plan'. The final document was 20 pages long, but it could be easily summarised by a simple listing of its 'International Development Goals' (IDGs) that all OECD members had approved (Appendix 1).<sup>24</sup>

### 2.3 The International Development Goals: Responses and progress

The IDGs received media attention for only a few days. Their main impacts depended on how they filtered back to the OECD countries that had agreed them and on the responses of other organisations. Formally within the OECD they made good progress. They were endorsed at several OECD ministerial meetings and by the G7 at its 1996, 1997 and 1998 meetings (Bradford, 2002: 5). However in many of the OECD member countries the document did not appear to be having much practical impact. This was not surprising, as *Shaping the 21st Century* did not have a plan of action and it was a collective document that belonged to a set of minor ministries or agencies in the rich countries. For example, John Vereker, the UK's lead bureaucrat on international development, is reported to have engaged in the drafting process primarily to ensure that the proposal did no damage to the UK aid programme. Having achieved this aim, the document could be put aside.<sup>25</sup> USAID took it back to Washington DC, but with Jesse Helms chairing the Foreign Relations Committee it was unlikely to have much immediate influence on policy. As far as one can judge, the 'like minded' group of developmentally progressive donors (Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden) took the agreement seriously. But they were already pursuing IDG-type policies and had limited leverage over the larger donors (US, Japan, UK, France) and the multilateral

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<sup>23</sup> Phil Evans, DFID, 1 January 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Distinguishing between goals, targets, indicators and other forms of objective has spawned a consultancy industry that has financed several early retirements. In the US the specific statements made are known as the IDGs. However, in the UK, they are known as the International Development Targets (IDTs).

<sup>25</sup> This is not to suggest that Vereker saw no value in the IDGs. As Clare Short notes (2004), Vereker provided great support for her in her championing of the IDGs. Vereker's colleagues in ODA/DFID describe his actions as those of a skilled civil servant. The IDGs were not particularly relevant to Conservative aid policy, so they could be put on the shelf. Once the government changed and Short became Minister and identified the need for a set of goals Vereker was just the man to get them down from the shelf and rapidly move them forward.



institutions. They, and others, were also concerned about the political horse-trading involved in watering down the gender content of the agreement. It looked as though the IDGs and their focus on a list of development targets might be a small step forward, but not one that was to have great long-term significance. The DAC had developed them with a view to mustering political and public support, but without political leadership their potential seemed unlikely to be activated.

In the objects of development cooperation – the governments of developing countries and their poor – the *Shaping the 21st Century* and the IDGs had little or no recognition or resonance. Unlike the UN Summit agreements, this was a document produced entirely by rich countries. Poor country representatives attended consultation conferences in the Hague and Okinawa but the document's promises and promotion of 'partnership' sounded like standard aid agency rhetoric. For decades the DAC had encouraged OECD countries to harmonise aid and adopt best practices in recipient countries, but recipients knew from experience that donor countries almost always ended up doing their own thing. Besides, the primary agencies with which poorer countries had to engage were the World Bank and IMF. DAC agreements would only significantly change policies or behaviours if they led to the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) changing their practices.

The responses of the major multilaterals varied. For the UN the report and the IDGs had significance (see next section). The IDGs registered at the World Bank but appear to have had little impact at the IMF. The education specialists at the Bank were pleased to see the apparent commitment of bilateral donors to educational goals: this should improve resource availability for their sector. There was disappointment from the many Bank staff who were committed to promoting gender equality that women's empowerment was not a more forceful part of the IDGs, but they recognised the progress that had been made with reproductive health. One clear impact to which the IDGs seemed related was the launch in 1997 of the Bank's *Global Monitoring Report*, featuring the IDGs as a monitoring framework (Bradford, 2002: 5). This reflected the Bank's comparative advantage – rigorously collating and analysing statistics – and also reinforced its ownership of the agenda on measuring development. By contrast, at the IMF the IDGs and *Shaping the 21st Century* seem barely to have registered. Some saw the emphasis on social development as part of a 'European Model'<sup>26</sup> that countered the Fund's focus on economic growth through liberalisation and the need for fiscal prudence. The IMF was used to seeing such documents and calls come and go.<sup>27</sup> The IDGs would only impact on the Fund if its major shareholder, the US, decided it wanted to promote such a vision.

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<sup>26</sup> Statement from IMF staff member who wishes to remain anonymous.

<sup>27</sup> It was not until fall 1999 that Michel Camdessus, Managing Director of the IMF, committed the IMF to the IDGs.

The responses of NGOs varied depending on their goals and ideological orientation. Broad-based development NGOs, still engaged in their confrontation with structural adjustment and conditionality, could take satisfaction in an agenda that included several WSSD goals and incorporated 'social development' as a core component. The IDGs envisioned the expansion of education and health services rather than the IFI's focus on constraining public expenditure. There were concerns, however, that many of the actions that were within the control of OECD members, if they had the political will – increased aid, debt forgiveness, fairer trade – were not included in the IDGs. For issue-based NGOs the response depended on the treatment of their issue. Save the Children might be pleased with Universal Primary Education and reduced child and infant mortality goals, but there was little in the IDGs for the older persons that HelpAge International assists. Environmental NGOs saw a confirmation of the Rio Declaration and a further acceptance of the arguments that development and poverty reduction had to involve environmental goals. NGOs concerned about reproductive health rights were pleased to see their main goal in the text, but women's NGOs, and more broadly the social movement for gender equality, were livid at the watering down of the gender goal. For more radical NGOs and the emerging networks of anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation groups then the IDGs were just more of the same – capitalism trying to mask its exploitation of labour and the environment through the rhetoric of social development. But the NGO and social movement response was largely a 'northern' response. For NGOs in the developing world the vision of the OECD for the future of their countries and the drawing up of the IDGs barely registered.

Saith (2006: 1170) provides a critique of *Shaping the 21st Century* and the IDGs from a radical perspective:

It is significant to note...that the OECD/DAC listing has a different character to the earlier [UN summit] declarations, since this formulation emerges from a small club of rich nations...[it] is much less ambitious in its scope and aspirations with regard to the broader and deeper dimensions of emancipatory development. There is a clear shift ...in favour of a narrower frame focussing essentially on absolute poverty and deprivation, and away from a broader, more essentialist rights-based approach.

For those involved in drafting the document and drawing up the IDGs, this was exactly the task they had been set – to come up with a list of potentially achievable, concrete and measurable goals that would appeal to OECD politicians and publics. Their political frontier was gender empowerment: they had managed to keep that in the text. Anything more than that – reduced inequality between countries, or between people more generally, or criticism of capitalism – would not have achieved OECD agreement.

## 2.4 The UN system and the DAC's International Development Goals

From the UN and its agencies – so heavily involved in organising the summits and conferences from which the IDGs were drawn – there were a variety of responses. As far as one can judge, none was especially enthusiastic. There was clearly some confusion about how to respond. While the UN might take satisfaction in DAC taking up so many UN Summit agreements, the DAC appeared to be taking control of a UN agenda, and OECD political concerns had determined what could and could not be put on the list. James Gustave Speth, Director of UNDP, advised the DAC in May 1995 that '[t]he UN was at that moment working to synthesise all the agreements and UN commitments of the UN conferences and to try to harmonise the UN's follow-up' (DAC 1995b: 18-19).<sup>28</sup>

While an agency such as UNICEF might be happy to see universal primary education, parity for girls in primary education and reductions in infant and child mortality goals repeated, at the United Nations Development Fund for Women there was deep dissatisfaction with the modesty of the gender goal. *The Human Development Report 1997* provides some insights into the UNDP's thinking and shows how its position on global poverty differed from the DAC. In Chapter 6 it examines 'Eradicating human poverty worldwide – an agenda for the 21st century'. This chapter, around the same length as DAC's *Shaping the 21st Century*, covers similar terrain but in a markedly different way. A comparison of these two documents reveals (at least) five main differences.

The first concerns the reasons for setting grand goals. The UNDP (1997: 106) presents this as '...a moral imperative and a commitment to human solidarity. It is a practical possibility – and in the long run an economic imperative for global prosperity'. It highlights the moral arguments for poverty eradication, arguing that 'human poverty constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights' and barely references the more selfish motivations. By contrast, targeting rich world politicians and publics, the DAC is less idealistic and identifies three principal motivations – humanitarian, enlightened self-interest (development expands markets and reduces migration) and global solidarity (DAC, 1996: 6). So, the UNDP presents a moral argument with a hint of benefits for the non-poor; the DAC balances the moral argument with an argument for self-interest and rounds off with the solidarity case of the IDGs being good for the poor and for the rich.

The second difference relates to the overarching goal of these agenda-setting exercises. For the UNDP in 1997 this is total poverty eradication, as declared at the WSSD in 1995, with each country individually setting the target date for this achievement. The DAC is more modest, opting for poverty reduction – reducing income poverty by half by 2015. It

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<sup>28</sup> However, I can find no follow up to this. The UN does not appear to have produced any listing in the mid-1990s, other than the one in *Human Development Report 1997*.

acknowledges that this is only half of the Copenhagen target, 'but it seeks to give that target a concrete, attainable focus for the medium-term' (DAC, 1996: 9). While the UN is promoting a vision the DAC, with many of its members pursuing results-based management as part of their public sector reforms, is looking for SMART<sup>29</sup> targets intended to shape senior manager behaviours. In addition, while the UN explicitly specifies the need to reduce inequality – 'Moderating inequality is the first step in ending poverty' (UNDP, 1997: 110) – and highlights the 'obscenities of excess' of rich world billionaires, the DAC studiously avoids the mention of global income and asset inequalities.

The third main difference concerns the level at which the goals are pitched. The UN provides global assessments of past and future trends, but emphasises that target-setting, in terms of the date of achievement of goals, and planning is for national governments. For DAC the goals are global and, despite the pious statements about 'partnership', there is little emphasis on national goals, policies or plans. This difference of viewpoint – basically whether developing countries could be trusted to set their own targets or needed to all be given the same targets – would run for many years to come.<sup>30</sup>

Fourth is the contrast between the relative role of growth in achieving goals. Both organisations acknowledge the importance of growth and the difficulties of poverty reduction without growth. However, implicitly, DAC places a higher priority on growth, with 'economic well-being' heading its IDGs and income-poverty reduction appearing as the first among equals. The *Human Development Report 1997* reverses this in its presentation (UNDP, 1997: 108-109) focusing on human development goals, placing growth at the end of its discussion. It also qualifies growth: if goals are to be met, then 'pro-poor growth' is needed.

Finally, there is the way in which the UNDP report refers to *Shaping the 21st Century*. The *Human Development Report 1997* uses its own summary of UN Summit declarations – thus adding life expectancy, child malnutrition, universal access to affordable primary health care and family planning, disease eradication and adult literacy goals – and presents DAC's report as a small summary box (UNDP, 1997:114) that is not referenced in the text. Clearly, for the Human Development Report Office at UNDP the IDGs had little significance.

While both the UNDP and DAC are pursuing an overarching goal of tackling global poverty, their immediate sub-goals are very different. The UNDP is still pursuing a grand human rights approach building on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

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<sup>29</sup> Management consultants advise that targets should be Stretching, Measurable, Agreed, Recorded and Time-limited.

<sup>30</sup> The Millennium Project, directed by Jeffrey Sachs, decided that all developing countries should have the same targets (UN Millennium Project, 2005: 3). Key UNDP staff involved with the MDGs, such as Jan van der Moortele, thought this was 'crazy'.

The DAC's focus is much narrower – making the case for increased foreign aid and demonstrating that aid will be used effectively. For the UN the primary audiences are its member states (189 countries) and influential interest groups and NGOs: for DAC the target audiences are its member states (20 rich countries) and public opinion in those countries. There are also differences in the ways that the organisations envisage agreements and lists changing policies and practices. The UN has an incrementalist, visionary, political model underpinning its efforts. Resolutions can pull member states that are lagging (from a human rights perspective) into agreeing to do things differently and then annual monitoring, and +five- and +ten-year follow-up meetings encourage implementation and lead to gradual improvements. The DAC approach is based much more in the audit culture of the 'new public management' that was so powerful in many OECD countries in the 1990s. Targets are to operate as market surrogates to ensure organisational performance – they must be clear, precise, and measurable so that agencies, senior managers (and perhaps even ministers) can be held accountable for performance. The values behind DAC's list is a Third Way-type 'politics of what works', not a normative or ideological belief in human rights. These different ideologies set in motion a twin track process that would lead to the production of different sets of global poverty reduction goals in March 2001.

## **2.5 Selling the IDGs in the rich world: Clare Short and the Utstein Group**

Drawing up the IDGs had unleashed a genie – the idea that an authoritative list of concrete development goals could be drawn up and used as a mechanism to rapidly reduce global poverty. The IDG list had received an initial set of responses, from the laudatory to the damning. The political and public visibility of the IDGs might have slowed down at this time but for three factors. None of these was programmed or planned – serendipity was to intervene again. The first factor was elections and party politics in the UK; second was the coincidence of four Northern European women being ministers for international development at the same time; and third, looming over all of this, was the approach of 1st January 2000 and the UN Millennium Assembly and Summit of September 2000.

In May 1997 New Labour swept into power in the UK on the back of a landslide victory headed by Tony Blair. This marked the beginning of an era when the UK would become a major player in international development, would focus sharply on poverty reduction, would pursue a strategy of influencing the 'big players' (World Bank, IMF, UN, US, Japan and EU) and would, as it were, 'punch well above its weight'. A major component of these changes was the use of the IDGs by the new government. Several factors above and beyond the manifesto commitments explain the transformation of the role of the British government in development debates and actions at national, multilateral and global levels.

First was the appointment of Clare Short as the Secretary of State for International Development. This position now merited a senior cabinet post and it was filled by a powerful and 'larger than life' figure. Short had been disappointed before the elections at being shifted from the transport portfolio,<sup>31</sup> where she was making ambitious plans to reinvent public transport in the UK, to international development (Short, 2004:49-50). However, after some thought she decided that this portfolio was even better than transport and took the task to heart. As her acquaintances knew, when Clare Short took something to heart she committed all her energy, intellect and passion to it: when challenged, she would stick to her position, negotiate hard and become intransigent. Her personal power was reinforced by her position within New Labour. She was seen as being further to the left than most other ministers, she came from a traditional Labour background and had deep roots in her constituency and the local Labour party. This gave her an iconic position in Cabinet. New Labour was involved in a political juggling act. It had to show that it was different from 'old' Labour while maintaining the historical support it received from these core elements. Clare Short helped with this difficult juggling act: she had 'old' Labour credentials but was committed to making New Labour successful. This strengthened her influence in Cabinet and the position of her new Department. Clare Short had to be kept happy, or if not happy, at least content enough and occupied enough not to go 'sounding off' about New Labour policies.

The broader political and administrative context around Clare Short and her Department for International Development (DFID) was also very positive. The Chancellor, Gordon Brown, had long taken an interest in development and global poverty and so she found herself in an unusual position, for an international development minister, of being treated as a budget priority rather than being placed at the back of the queue. Even better, New Labour was keen to show its supporters that it was different from the Conservatives, but it had promised not to raise public expenditure above the ceilings set by the Conservatives for at least three years. DFID would be the beneficiary of this commitment. Increasing spending in any 'big spend' area – education, health, social security, transport – would dishonour the promise of fiscal prudence. In contrast, significant increases in the foreign aid budget had only minor impacts on total expenditure (because in 1997 the aid budget was only about 0.75 percent of public expenditure) but showed that New Labour was different from the Conservatives. It also provided good soundbites.<sup>32</sup> Short's passionate advocacy for increased foreign aid – with the Cabinet and the public – made this an even more attractive policy option.

Beyond Westminster and Whitehall the environment was also supportive. Although Short and the UK's major NGOs were often mutually antagonistic, these NGOs (ActionAid, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Save the Children and others) had done an effective job of selling development and global poverty reduction to the citizenry. Across the UK an

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<sup>31</sup> It seems that Tony Blair was worried that she might use terms such as 'nationalisation' and might oppose further privatisations in transport infrastructure.

<sup>32</sup> Soundbites were central to New Labour's political strategy under Tony Blair.

energetic minority of people<sup>33</sup> were committed to foreign aid, fair trade, debt forgiveness and IFI reform. The Jubilee 2000 debt forgiveness campaign over the late 1990s was also effective in making many people in the UK pro-development. Alongside this a silent majority were sympathetic to some vague idea of humanitarian relief and international development.

Short was looking for a device to focus DFID, mobilise public support in the UK and drive the international system forward. She found what she was looking for in the IDGs, in what appears to have been a Damascene moment for her:

It was Richard Jolly.....who pointed me to the report of the development committee of the OECD entitled *Shaping the 21st Century*. It drew together the recommendations of the great UN conferences of the 1990s ... and suggested that a great advance was possible if we focussed on the systematic reduction of poverty... I decided I would work to make this the framework for our development efforts...I was determined to make my new ministry an exemplary player and to use UK influence to drive the international system forward (Short, 2004: 53-54).

Senior staff at DFID report Short's immediate enthusiasm for the IDGs: they were exactly what she wanted.<sup>34</sup> Her November 1997 White Paper, following the DAC, focused on world poverty and sought to set an agenda for the 21st Century. It was entitled *Eliminating World Poverty: A Challenge for the 21st Century*. Its opening section reviewed the recent experience with human poverty, reproduced the IDGs and provided a 'statement of purpose' for her new department, based on the three main objectives of the IDGs.<sup>35</sup> Her senior advisors at DFID were set the task of preparing International Development Targets Papers, explaining how the UK aid programme had and would contribute to the achievement of each of the seven IDGs. This was not just a bureaucratic exercise – all DFID's staff got a strong message: whatever DFID was funding had to be framed in terms of IDG achievement and when they interacted with other development stakeholders (other development agencies, UK departments, contractors, NGOs, academics, politicians) they had to demand 'how does this contribute to IDG achievement?'.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> For example, Oxfam had a member in every UK parliamentary constituency tasked to regularly meet with their local MP to raise development issues. All UK MPs were to get the message that international development was a local political issue.

<sup>34</sup> Interviews with Phil Evans, Ros Eyben and Andy Norton.

<sup>35</sup> It also talks of the 'qualitative elements' needed to attain the quantifiable targets in the same way as *Shaping the 21st Century*. However, the importance of human rights gets a higher profile in the DFID White Paper.

<sup>36</sup> As someone regularly working with DFID at this time, I recall being niggled by the persistent posing of this question. Whether one was expressing an opinion on a research proposal at HQ, designing a project in Bangladesh, evaluating a programme in Kenya or providing a seminar for DFID staff on retreat this question would soon arise. With the wisdom of hindsight one has to be

Her second application of the IDGs was selling these goals to Cabinet colleagues, the Labour Party and the UK public. The Cabinet had to approve the IDGs through its approval of the White Paper, especially those affected by the section on 'the consistency of policies' that had implications for the Treasury, Foreign Office, DTI and Defence. The public were engaged by a variety of initiatives: Short launched the White Paper at a number of venues and highlighted the IDGs. A short version of the White Paper was produced and put into supermarkets for people to pick up as they left. After the launches a series of civil society consultations were mounted in every region of the UK drawing in NGOs, faith groups, social activists and academics<sup>37</sup> and finishing with a meeting of several hundred delegates at the NEC in Birmingham. DFID's publicity division was cranked up to unprecedented levels to get coverage in the newspapers, radio and TV. Short's public recognition in the UK rose and rose. Alongside this so did the ideas of international development, global poverty reduction and international development goals.

The third application of the IDGs was for Short and DFID to use them to influence other players in international development:

Our other major campaign [alongside debt relief] was to win international support for the International Development Targets...We believed that the targets could move the world to start to implement the grand declarations it agreed on through the UN...Gradually the targets were adopted by the World Bank, IMF and EU, and then, as the agreed objectives of the Millennium Conference of the UN General Assembly<sup>38</sup> (Short, 2004: 88-89).

Short visited all of the major donors and development agencies, energetically advocating that everyone use the IDGs to sharpen their programming, harmonise activity and mobilise public support. She also 'sold' them to African and Asian heads of state and ministers and, according to her advisors,<sup>39</sup> was surprised when some of these were not so enthusiastic about this product of the rich nations.

It is probably accurate to say that Short did more than any other individual, and more than many DAC member countries, over 1997 and 1998 to promote the IDGs as a central component of the fight against world poverty. But she also had some key allies. In 1998 at the spring meeting of the IMF and World Bank, she met Evelyn Herfkens (the

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impressed with how rapidly and deeply DFID staff took on the poverty reduction mantra that Short wanted.

<sup>37</sup> I convened the North West event at the University of Manchester. More than 200 delegates attended and, as planned by DFID, the IDGs (which I treated with great cynicism at that time as another set of false promises) were programmed in as a major component of discussion.

<sup>38</sup> As is discussed in detail below, Short is in error about this. While there are significant overlaps between the IDGs and the poverty reduction goals in the Millennium Declaration, the IDGs were not adopted by the General Assembly.

<sup>39</sup> Interviews with Phil Evans and Ros Eyben.



Netherlands), Hilde Johnson (Norway) and Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul (Germany), who were all ministers for international development for their respective countries (ibid). Very rapidly a strong bond grew between them: they all had similar policy thrusts, they were all passionate about politics and about poverty reduction; they had all carved out successful careers in a man's world; and, they now found themselves part of a small number of women in a field that had been for decades, and remained, an (ageing) boys' club. They came to be known as the 'Utstein Group', after the location of the IMF/Bank meeting at which they first met, and they pursued Short's campaign for the IDGs. Although at least one of the boys thought it rather a laugh seeing '...four women with shrill voices in a huddle...' <sup>40</sup> they became a powerful force. <sup>41</sup> The policy narrative of the IDGs as the means to rapidly reduce global poverty was amplified. This message carried through to the UN and the planning of the Millennium Assembly – but this is getting ahead of events.

## 2.6 Preparing for the Millennium Assembly: 'We the peoples'

By late 1998 the progress of the IDGs was much more than delegates at the May 1995 High Level Meeting of DAC might reasonably have expected when they had debated establishing a *Groupe de Réflexion*. The UN was now about to energetically re-enter the game of global target setting. During 1998 it had started to lay plans for 'the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations', 'the mother of all summits', to be held in New York in September 2000. The Secretary General, Kofi Annan, was well aware that an event that happens only once every thousand years creates an unprecedented opportunity to raise ambitions and open up political space for key issues that have not made enough progress. He was keen to put UN reform forcefully back on the agenda and a series of meetings with member states and NGOs was held to select topics that should be the focus of the Millennium Assembly and of a Millennium Declaration. <sup>42</sup>

Over the following period, international agencies, NGOs and activists began to try to shape the processes and the content of the Millennium Assembly. Individuals, organisations and networks strove to get the declarations they valued into the Millennium Declaration in September 2000. If 'your goal' was in the Declaration, then you could put it on the agenda at national and international meetings for years to come. As Sinding (quoted in Crossette, 2004) expressed it some years later: 'If you're not an MDG, you're not on the agenda'. Websites buzzed, email campaigns piled up in

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<sup>40</sup> A senior male member of DFID's staff was threatened with a sexual harassment case for using this expression about the Utstein Group. He rapidly withdrew the comment!

<sup>41</sup> Sir Christopher Meyer, former UK ambassador to the UN and the US, highlighted the Utstein Group's effectiveness in a BBC radio programme, 'How to succeed at summits', 12 July 2006.

<sup>42</sup> See United Nations, May 1999, 'The Millennium Assembly of the United Nations: Thematic Framework for the Millennium Summit' (UN A/53/948) for details of the meetings.

ministers' accounts and large and small meetings were convened, especially in the rich world.

The pressures on the Secretary-General and the UN Secretariat were enormous, especially as the UN's '50th Anniversary' Summit in 1997 was widely judged to have been unsuccessful. The Millennium Assembly had to be a success. The world, as a community, must start the new millennium in a positive frame of mind, energised and mobilised to take action on global problems. Closer to home the UN, whose credibility had been declining over the previous decade, had to show its value to its members and the wider global public and elicit a commitment that its members (and especially its most powerful members – the US and the permanent members of the Security Council) would support real efforts to reform the UN and finance it, so that it could become a more effective body. The Assembly needed to glow with global solidarity and no attention-diverting disagreements or fall-outs must reach the media. None of the main players, and ideally none of the minor players, must be seen to break ranks with a Millennium Declaration consensus.

Kofi Annan thought carefully about how to ensure that the Millennium Assembly would produce a coherent Declaration. He decided that he would take responsibility for this by producing a document for all UN members, and the global public, to examine. The plan was that revisions to this document would form the basis for the Declaration. He appointed his senior advisor, John Ruggie, a distinguished US academic, to prepare the draft document. Ruggie was not a 'norm entrepreneur' – like Jim Grant or Fafis Sadik – his function was as a 'message entrepreneur' (Fukuda-Parr and Hulme, 2009). He had to craft a document based on the UN conference and summit declarations, to which all UN members would agree. This became *We the Peoples* (Annan, 2000).

On 3 April 2000 Kofi Annan launched *We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century*. 'The object of my Report is to provide that gathering [the Millennium Summit] with a basic document to work from', he told the General Assembly. Poverty eradication was the leading global issue for the Report. Its first section focused on 'freedom from want' and the first point in its conclusion argued that '...we must spare no effort to free our fellow men and women from abject and dehumanising poverty...'. This document was very different from the DAC's *Shaping the 21st Century*. It was much longer, at 80 pages, and it covered a much wider range of topics, with major sections on globalisation and governance, conflict and renewing the UN. Most important, for this paper, it had a quite different set of poverty reduction goals from the IDGs. A comparison of the goals prioritised in *We the Peoples* and those in *Shaping the 21st Century* and the *Human Development Report 1997* reveals a number of goals that have disappeared or been watered down (the 'losers') and others that are 'winners' (i.e. they appeared on

Annan's listing but not in the DAC listing.<sup>43</sup> There are three big losers – gender equality and women's empowerment, reproductive health and more generally the goals for the health sector. In addition, the 20:20 vision proposal was not rehabilitated in *We the Peoples*. Arguably, the 'winners' were economic growth, technology, the setting of goals for the rich countries, the environment and the highlighting of Africa's problems. Each of these is looked at in turn.

**Gender equality and women's empowerment:** *We the Peoples* does not explicitly identify these as a goal. 'Equal opportunities for both genders' is mentioned in the executive summary; the poverty chapter (Chapter 2) raises concerns about 'gender discrimination in wages, property rights and access to education', and the contribution that women make to economic growth is discussed. But nowhere is there any re-affirmation of the Beijing Plan of Action. As a goal, gender equality is subsumed under the educational target, '...that girls and boys will have equal access to all levels of education by 2015' (Annan, 2000: 77). Despite support from European states, and very strong endorsements from the World Bank, a small but powerful set of interests – led by the Vatican and supported by a handful of conservative Islamic states and anti-abortion Christian groups in North America – managed to move the issue to the margins of the document.<sup>44</sup> As is shown in the next section, this alliance was even more successful with the reproductive health goal – making it disappear entirely.

**Reproductive health:**<sup>45</sup> The non-appearance of reproductive health in *We the Peoples* provides detailed insights into the often hidden processes of global policy-making (for a more detailed discussion of the fate of reproductive health in the MDGs see Hulme, 2009). Despite the goal of providing universal access to reproductive health having repeatedly been agreed at the UN, it failed to make the April 2000 document. Perhaps even more surprisingly, the goal of reducing maternal mortality was not included in *We the Peoples*.

In brief, what has been labelled 'an unholy' alliance (Berer, 2001) was mobilising and would prove highly effective. According to Sen (2005: 49) this was spearheaded by the Vatican and included the UN delegations of conservative Islamic countries and conservative, evangelical Christian groups from the US. The influence of the Vatican

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<sup>43</sup> For *We the Peoples*, identifying the precise priorities is a little difficult as the executive summary identifies six poverty reduction priorities while the conclusion lists eight (or 12 if you include the goals for rich countries) that are somewhat different from those in the summary.

<sup>44</sup> For discussions of this alliance, see the references in Hulme (2009).

<sup>45</sup> *Reproductive health* is the complete physical, mental and social wellbeing in all matters related to the reproductive system. This implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capacity to have children and the freedom to decide if and when to do so. Reproductive health care is defined as the constellation of methods, techniques and services that contribute to reproductive health and wellbeing by preventing and solving reproductive health problems (Standing, 2004: 240).

was amplified through its interactions with a small number of conservative Islamic countries in the G77 (the UN's informal association of developing countries, which now numbers around 130 members). For the most conservative Islamic countries of the G77<sup>46</sup> – led by Sudan and with the active involvement of Libya and Iran – this meant ensuring that the G77 blocked the reproductive health goal out of *We the Peoples*. The G77 ‘...was internally split on the issue but opted [as its norm] for a consensus that would not offend its most conservative members’ (Crossette, 2004: 3). A handful of G77 members was thus able to ensure that the G77 opposed reproductive health goals and that this message was forcefully relayed to the Secretary-General. No Secretary-General, and particularly one from the developing world, could refuse to heed the G77 message. The concerns of these conservatives that the reduced maternal mortality goal was a covert means of promoting the idea of women’s reproductive health rights meant that this goal was also blocked.

European countries argued strongly that reproductive health was an essential component of a strategy for poverty reduction and that the other goals of the Declaration could not be achieved if reproductive health was omitted – but the Secretary-General and Secretariat were not going to risk producing a document that the G77, the majority of UN members, could not approve. To their chagrin, and that of reproductive health proponents around the world, the April 2000 Report of the Secretary-General to frame the Millennium Summit avoided mention of the Cairo Agenda. Odd references to relevant issues occur<sup>47</sup> – but, the resolutions of Cairo, Beijing and New York are missing.

**Health issues:** Health issues made it through to the recommendations list in *We the Peoples*, but in a limited form that surprised many in the health sector (and outside of it).<sup>48</sup> Quite what happened – why the agreements of the 1990s and the interests of the WHO, WFP, UNICEF and others had so little influence at New York – is unclear. The executive summary of *We the Peoples* identifies two health goals – redirecting health research budgets to the problems that affect 90 percent of people and reducing the rate of HIV infection for young people by 25 percent. The list in the conclusion differs and includes one health goal: by 2015 to ‘have halted and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS’; and one health-related goal: ‘to halve [by 2015] the proportion of people...who are unable to reach, or to afford, safe drinking water’. While there are references in the text to other health problems (almost unavoidable in an 80-page document with a poverty focus), these focus mainly on HIV/AIDS. The agreements to

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<sup>46</sup> Saudi Arabia might be expected to take part in this group, but it is reported as generally not engaging actively at the UN.

<sup>47</sup> ‘In Africa, the high burden of disease not only requires families to stretch their meagre resources but also locks them into a high fertility-high, mortality poverty trap’; ‘As a next step [to reducing HIV infection], ready access to essential services and preventive technologies must be provided, including male and female condoms’ (p.27); ‘Women have become especially vulnerable to violence and sexual exploitation’.

<sup>48</sup> I must confess to being one of these.

reduce child and infant mortality (Children's Summit, ICPD and Women's Conference) and maternal mortality (ICPD and Women's Conference) that figure so prominently in DAC's IDGs are avoided. As one reads the text in the 'poverty' chapter, child survival seems to be taken for granted and the main focus is on education and youth employment with a distinctly instrumental thrust – educating children and getting youths into work is good for growth. The contrast with the listing in the *Human Development Report 1997* could not be more marked – five of the seven bullet points drawn from 'the global conferences of the 1990s' are directly about health (UNDP, 1997:108). The UN Secretariat and the UNDP seem to be operating in different worlds.

**The 20:20 Vision:** *We the Peoples* was the last chance for the idea of a 20:20 vision (see earlier) for the financing of social development by aid agencies and national governments to return to the global poverty agenda – it failed. The DAC, in its IDGs, had decided to avoid 20:20, and efforts by NGOs to re-ignite debate did not succeed. The donor countries were not keen to have what they saw as conditionalities placed on their foreign aid budgets and many developing country heads of state or government and finance ministers did not find the idea attractive.

Just as there were a number of potential goals that were losers, in terms of being listed in *We the Peoples* and heading for the Millennium Declaration, there were also some 'winners'. These include economic growth, technology (especially IT), the idea that there should be goals for rich countries (what turned into Goal 8 of the MDGs), the environment and the special problems and needs of Africa.

**Economic growth:** In *We the Peoples*, economic growth receives a much greater focus than one might have expected in a document drawing together the resolutions from the UN conferences of the 1990s. In the executive summary, 'achieving sustained economic growth' is the first priority identified in the 'poverty' chapter and three pages are allocated to this topic. In the conclusion, reducing \$1-a-day income poverty heads the poverty goals, suggesting that growth (or pro-poor growth) is the priority.

**Technology:** Technology gets a relatively high profile in *We the Peoples* (certainly when compared to *Shaping the 21st Century* or the *Human Development Report 1997* on poverty). The sixth of the priorities identified in the executive summary is 'building digital bridges' and argues that 'New technology offers an unprecedented chance for developing countries to "leapfrog" earlier stages of development' (Annan, 2000: 2). The 'poverty' chapter has three-and-a-half pages on this topic (vastly more than an issue such as child survival achieves), and the seventh (of the eight poverty goals) recommended to the Summit is 'To ensure that the benefits of new technology, especially information technology, are available to all' (ibid: 78).

Several factors played a part in the prominence given to IT. Most obviously, 2000 was the peak of the speculative bubble about the internet and a time at which the financial services industry was promoting the idea that ICTs had driven the world into a 'new economy' that would lead to a prolonged period of sustained increases in productivity. Secondly, whenever people stare into the crystal ball to talk about the long-term future, a major discussion of technology seems to be inevitable. Finally, the emphasis on IT did not have a strong interest group that would raise an objection to it – if Kofi Annan and his advisors wanted this as a priority no-one (or at least no-one important) would complain.

**Goals for rich countries:** Contained within *We the Peoples* is an initial statement of what would eventually turn into Goal 8 of the MDGs. The executive summary identifies the priority of 'Demonstrating global solidarity: Rich countries must further open their markets to poor countries' products, must provide deeper and faster debt relief, and must give more and better focused development assistance...' (ibid: 2). The 'poverty' chapter covered five pages on trade access, debt relief and official development assistance. A separate section in the recommendations re-iterated these three issues and added a fourth priority – working with the pharmaceutical industry to achieve a breakthrough with an HIV/AIDS vaccine and to make HIV-related drugs cheaper. This emphasis on what the rich world must do was a new element in the evolution of the MDGs. Up until this time poverty reduction goals, with the exception of the environmental goal, had been seen as goals that must be achieved in developing countries – this was clear in the IDGs. Accompanying text would discuss the need for trade reform, debt relief and aid. Many parties engaged in the Millennium Summit negotiations – individual developing countries, the G77, UNDP, UNCTAD and the NGOs and campaigns that had done so much to mobilise attention on debt, trade and aid – felt that the lead that DAC had initially established in drawing up its list of goals meant that the list was unbalanced. The IDGs had laid down targets for the developing world to achieve but had no targets for rich countries. It seemed only reasonable to set targets for rich country reforms and support. *We the Peoples* started off this process with the OECD's countries' concurrence – the devil would come later in attempting to agree on detailed targets.

**Sustainable development and the environment:** The Rio Summit had reached a consensus that development should be sustainable and *We the Peoples* took this forward strongly with a chapter on 'sustaining our future', which argued for the needs of future generations. This chapter, and the recommendations, took a relatively strong line on what this meant, and despite the objections of rich countries and particularly the US, it explicitly recommended the goal of having the Kyoto Protocol come into force in 2002.

**HIV/AIDS:** Earlier it was argued that the health issues were neglected in Annan's document. But there was one clear winner in the health sector – HIV/AIDS. It figures directly in the priorities listed in the executive summary, is a major part of the 'poverty' chapter and in the concluding chapter it is one of the eight recommendations aimed at

directly reducing poverty, is one of the four recommendations about the goals for rich countries and also is singled out as a major problem in Africa. A Martian reading the final chapter of *We the Peoples* could quite reasonably conclude that HIV/AIDS was the only health problem facing poor people. The degree to which this was a result of specific lobbying pressure and consultation or, alternatively, was given such an exceptionally high prioritisation because Annan and his advisors still felt that the world had not woken up to the scourge of HIV/AIDS, is not clear. Whatever, the message was ringing out loud and clear – HIV/AIDS should be at the top of any list about health and poverty.

**Africa:** In the report Africa is singled out as having deeper poverty than any other region and facing bigger problems. One-and-a-half pages in the 'poverty' chapter address the issue of 'including Africa', detailing the continent's problems and calling for a big push to increase agricultural productivity. The conclusion allocates a separate paragraph to Africa and argues 'That in all our efforts we will make special provision for the needs of Africa, and give our full support to Africans in their struggle to overcome the continent's problems' (Annan, 2000: 78). This is no surprise, given that the continent was now concluding its second 'lost decade' for development and poverty reduction and that any attempt to monitor poverty reduction almost inevitably found that Africa's progress was slower than other parts of the world. There were several potential proponents for highlighting Africa's special needs and no significant lobby to object to this. In the late 1990s, 'Africa' had become a specific item on the G8's formal agenda. Late in his second presidential term President Clinton was talking about Africa more and several African presidents were engaging in discussions about pan-African initiatives to kick-start economic growth across the continent and reduce poverty. Last but not least, for a Secretary-General with personal roots in Africa the deep and desperate problems facing poor Africans, in many countries the majority of the population, had been self-evident for many years.

## **2.7 Global Poverty Reduction Goals: A twin track process**

The launch of *We the People* provided a strong indication of the best deal for the global poor that Kofi Annan thought could be achieved at the Millennium Summit. Inevitably, it attracted a variety of responses, some of which could be parried by the document's ambiguity and length. With different sets of priorities identified in its executive summary and conclusion, with six grand overarching principles and with 80 pages of text, anyone concerned that their priority issue or goal had not been adequately covered could usually be referred to some part of the text. Renewed efforts came into action to get omitted goals onto the list, especially by the women's movement and reproductive health advocates who were the most obvious large group that was strongly dissatisfied.

Apart from keeping the UN's membership on board with his proposed goals, Annan needed to find a way of demonstrating that he was coordinating UN agreements on global poverty reduction with those of the other big players – the World Bank, IMF and the OECD. He did this by signing up to the DAC's IDGs, which already had Bank and IMF endorsement. While Clare Short and the Utstein Group had been promoting the IDGs, the DAC had been trying to sharpen the goals and had started to identify detailed 'indicators'<sup>49</sup> that would reveal whether a goal was or was not being achieved. These needed to be precise, measurable and, ideally, reasonable quality data should be readily available on them for all developing countries. These discussions provided opportunities for interest groups whose goal had not made the original IDG list to try to get their goal included as an indicator of some other goal. The game was still far from over.

In June 2000 the leaders of the four major development multilaterals demonstrated just how coordinated they were by launching a common document, *2000 A Better World for All: Progress towards the International Development Goals* (IMF, OECD, UN and World Bank, 2000). This was an unprecedented show of solidarity from these four agencies (Emmerij et al, 2001: 119). The document was carefully presented to show that there was no lead agency for this agreement – agencies were listed alphabetically (IMF, OECD, UN and World Bank), as were the signatures of their leaders (Annan, Johnson, Kohler and Wolfensohn).

*A Better World for All* reiterated the DAC's IDGs almost exactly. It reaffirmed the thinking behind DAC goal-setting efforts: poverty reduction is the primary challenge of development and quantitative goals must be set to improve performance and ensure accountability. 'The goals are set in precise terms – measured in numbers to ensure accountability' (ibid: 2). Where one might have expected differences in the positions of the different agencies, the document went for ambiguity. For example, while it sets precise goals and argues for their monitoring it also states that '[e]ach country must identify its own particular goals...', in effect contradicting the earlier statement. As for the DAC, partnership – or for this coalition 'true partnership' – is the key to achieving the goals. 'Our institutions are actively using these development goals as a common framework to guide our policies and programmes and to assess our effectiveness' (ibid: 3).

The IDGs had evolved between 1996 and 2000. The most obvious change was the separation of the infant/child mortality goal from the maternal mortality goal: the original six bullet points had turned into seven numbered targets (ibid: 5). The list now consisted of five social development goals sandwiched between an economic wellbeing goal and an environmental sustainability goal. It seemed that the IDGs had a strong social policy

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<sup>49</sup> At this stage the DAC had goals with subsidiary indicators. As these eventually progressed this was further refined into goals, targets and indicators.



thrust – more akin to UNDP (1997) than *We the Peoples*. A number of the goals had been expanded, with new indicators and targets. For example, the ‘reducing extreme poverty’ goal now had four indicators specified, covering the original indicator – reduced \$1-a-day poverty – and the poverty gap ratio, inequality (somewhat controversially) and child malnutrition.

Beyond the content of the listing, the launch of *A Better World for All* revealed an important aspect of the global poverty reduction goal-setting process – it was a twin track process. The OECD was continuing with its efforts

...to select...a limited number of indicators of success by which our efforts can be judged...We believe that a few specific goals will help clarify the vision of a higher quality of life for all people, and will provide guideposts against which progress towards that vision can be measured’ (DAC, 1996: 2 and 9).

In parallel, the UN was involved in a similar exercise – more complicated because of its larger and more diverse membership and also because it was less clear about whether the Millennium Declaration should provide narrow targets or grand visions, or both. Despite all the calls for coordination and harmonisation of development efforts by the UN and OECD, over decades, at this stage the two organisations were working on competing lists. The UN led efforts for the Millennium Declaration while the OECD led efforts for the IDGs. This permitted both organisations to manage the political pressures from their memberships, but it could only continue for a short while before the two lead agencies began to look a little foolish. Once the Millennium Declaration was settled, and it was time to move onto implementation, questions about the difficulty of coordinating two differing sets of goals would come thick and fast.

## **2.8 From *We the Peoples* to the Millennium Declaration and Millennium Assembly**

Over summer 2000, there were frantic negotiations about the final text for the Millennium Declaration. Our focus here is on the ‘development and poverty eradication’ section and not the entire document. There was a particular focus on what would go into the specific goals that would be spelt out in this section, as these seemed likely to attract publicity, policy changes and resources. The position of the OECD and virtually all of its members was clear – they would like to see the IDGs as the goals. For other parties – other UN member states, NGOs, social movements, private businesses – preferences varied with their interests and values. Networks of many different types – formally structured and loose coalitions, single issue and multiple issue, conservative and radical – sought multiple channels (the media, meetings with UN civil servants, cups of tea with Kofi Annan) to advance their issue or challenge issues over which they disagreed. The details of the myriad overt and covert final negotiations are not public knowledge, but by contrasting the concrete goals identified in *We the Peoples* and the Millennium

Declaration, a partial understanding of the processes shaping the final agreement can be glimpsed.

To deal with these last minute compromises the UN civil servants involved appear to have developed a particularly subtle but useful device. They divided the resolutions into two paragraphs. Paragraph 19 – ‘We resolve further’ – includes the items that are to go forward to the plan of action (the Secretary-General’s ‘road map’) that would follow the Millennium Assembly (i.e. they make the list in full). Paragraph 20 – ‘We also resolve’ – lists agreements that will not go forward as concrete items for implementation. In effect, this created a two-class system of goals – the first class (paragraph 19) and the second class (paragraph 20). During negotiations, a game of brinkmanship appears to have operated. Players can go for ‘all or nothing’, or they can recognise opposition to their issue and accept a paragraph 20 compromise. This means their goal will make the final listing but will not be a priority in the implementation phase.

**Extreme poverty:** This remains the first goal, but shifted from having a single target to having three targets. This involved the merging of goals 1 and 2 from *We the Peoples* and the addition of the IDG’s hunger target. There was a logic, for UN civil servants, of bringing under a single bullet point three aspects of extreme material poverty – lack of income, food and clean water – and this helped to keep the number of bullet points low.

**Education:** This goal remains identical to *We the People*, reflecting the global consensus on universal primary education since the 1960s (at least in rhetoric) and the initial negotiating success of the UN member states concerned about the explicit targeting of ‘gender equality and the empowerment of women’. However, the gender case has been advanced by a device that confuses those not used to diplomatic gamesmanship and gameswomanship. Gender equality and women’s empowerment appear in paragraph 20 – ‘we also resolve’ – a second class form of resolution.

**Infant, child and maternal mortality:** The inclusion of these goals was the most dramatic change between *We the Peoples* and the Millennium Declaration. They had a deep pedigree (resolved at the International Conference on Population and Development, re-affirmed at Beijing and Copenhagen and incorporated in the IDGs), strong support from the powerful gender equality and reproductive health lobbies, and the World Bank, WHO and UNICEF were very strongly behind them. This vast support had meant that even the strong objections of the unholy alliance were overruled. It appears that, as long as the reproductive health goal was left out of the final document and no mention made of reproductive and sexual health rights, a UN consensus could be maintained.

**Major diseases:** *We the Peoples*’ sole focus on HIV/AIDS has been broadened to include ‘malaria and other major diseases’. Health lobbyists appear to have been

successful in arguing with the Secretariat that purely focusing on HIV/AIDS creates the danger of distorting health budgets, aid flows and plans in ways that will impact negatively on overall health status. Effective health strategies have to integrate attacks on several major diseases and not attack diseases one at a time.

***AIDS orphans:*** The broadening of the health goal to cover major diseases appears to have been compensated for by the addition of this goal. The image of the AIDS orphan in the media of rich countries – victims of poverty who bore no responsibility for their plight – meant that this was certainly a good goal for public relations departments to push to Western audiences. Reports from the UN says that Kofi Annan was personally very keen to see the problem of HIV/AIDS spelt out in the Declaration and follow-up programme.

***Improving the lives of slum dwellers:*** This goal proceeded from *We the Peoples* to the declaration without modification.

***Decent work for youth:*** This goal has slipped from being on the main list to paragraph 20. The reasons for its demotion are unclear.

***Benefits of new technology:*** This goal experienced a similar fate – it slipped from the main listing to paragraph 20. The changing global narrative on ICTs over 2000, from ‘new economy’ to ‘internet bubble’, and its consequences on IT share values appears to have encouraged a ‘sell’ grading for this global goal.

***National policies and programmes for poverty reduction:*** The final goal of the *We the Peoples* listing fell off the Declaration list – it did not even manage to slip into paragraph 20. There is only hearsay around why this happened, but it is plausible. This claims that the technical argument that ‘this is a means and not an end’ held sway, and in political terms, this issue was already being taken care of by the IMF and World Bank as they pursued the extension of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) from being compulsory for Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) transfers to being a requirement for all developing countries wishing to access IFI finance.

***The special needs of small island states and landlocked developing countries:*** Paragraphs 17 and 18 reiterated the agreements of specialist UN summits that ‘the international community’ support these two groups of countries in overcoming the specific problems they face.

***Goals for rich countries:*** *We the Peoples* had taken the highly significant step of listing goals for rich countries – the types of policy change they would have to make to support global poverty reduction. These goals were included in the Millennium Declaration (paragraphs 15, 16 and 20), but none of these goals is specific in terms of specifying

deadlines for its achievement. In particular, a goal for the additional resources that the rich countries will contribute to the fight against global poverty is not included in the Declaration. That negotiation and decision was to be put off until the 2001 'High-level International and Intergovernmental Event on Financing for Development' (paragraph 14).

The additions, deletions and compromises discussed above worked – the Millennium Declaration was unanimously approved on 8th September 2000, following short speeches from most of the world's heads of state and government affirming their commitment. The Secretariat and Secretary-General could breathe a sigh of relief. The Millennium Assembly had been a success – the UN had put on a good show, the global media had headlined the event and reported on it in positive terms, the need to deepen UN reform processes appeared to have met with approval and, for those concerned with poverty, within the Declaration (and with the support of 189 countries and 147 heads of state and government) were the materials for drawing up an authoritative set of goals for global poverty reduction that could be pursued with unprecedented political commitment, resourcing and coordination.

In terms of global poverty reduction, the next stage was for the Secretary-General to draw up a 'road map' as to how the world would achieve its goals. There was no time for those on the treadmill of promoting global poverty reduction to take a breather. There were several components to this process:

- Finalising the list of goals and drawing up subsidiary targets and indicators.
- Preparing for the Finance for Development Summit.
- Organising a mechanism for a global plan and for national plans.
- Developing a mechanism for ensuring that public and media support for global poverty reduction is maintained and/or strengthened.

Here we focus on the first of these activities.

## **2.9 Concordance: From Millennium Declaration to Millennium Development Goals**

The heads of state and government and national delegations to the UN could breathe a sigh of relief as the Millennium Summit closed. The Declaration had been achieved and they could move on to the next issue. That was not the case for the multilateral agencies tasked with drawing up a plan for the implementation of the Declaration's goals. This was a daunting task – the design and operation of a global poverty reduction plan. This entailed allocating responsibilities to different agencies and actors, coordinating activities, monitoring progress and keeping up public support for this task. But, before

any of these could proceed, there had to be a final agreement on what exactly their goals and targets were.

At UN headquarters, technical specialists and statisticians were already working on defining indicators and sources of data for the goals of the Millennium Summit. They liaised with co-professionals at the DAC in Paris, who were ahead of them in this task, having been developing indicators for the IDGs since the mid-1990s.<sup>50</sup> As the UN agencies had to follow the listing provided by their member states, and as the OECD saw no reason to drop the IDGs it had been working with for five years (and had UN, World Bank and IMF agreement on), there were two possible ways that the twin track process might move along. The first option was to continue with a twin track process. This would mean that both organisations got their own way, but would make the job of understanding efforts for global poverty reduction (plans, structures, monitoring results, responsibilities) complex for implementing agencies and confusing for politicians, parliaments and publics. To put it bluntly, as people did behind closed doors, it would look like, and would be, a mess. The second option was to merge the two sets of goals. This idea was problematic for the UN – how could Annan explain to the General Assembly that he had decided to modify the agreement that 189 countries had reached? On the other side, why should the OECD change the IDGs? They had been endorsed in June 2000 by the UN, World Bank and IMF. Was the UN now trying to renege on this agreement?

This issue came to a head at a World Bank convened meeting in Washington DC, 19-21 March 2001. It was entitled 'From Consensus to Action: a Seminar on the International Development Goals', suggesting that the Bank, at least, would be happy to stick with the IDGs. The meeting was attended by more than 200 delegates from the multilaterals (World Bank, IMF, OECD, UNDP and UN specialised agencies), bilateral donor representatives and delegates from more than a dozen developing countries. It was designed as a high level technical meeting, which, with the wisdom of hindsight, was probably fortunate. The debates and negotiations were thus amongst international public servants with decades of experience in international development and poverty reduction – not amongst diplomats or foreign affairs ministers, who tend to focus on how decisions will impact on diverse, wider audiences or on 'trade-offs' with non-developmental topics. The opening addresses were by professional and managerial heads – Nick Stern, the Chief Economist at the World Bank, Sven Sandstrom, one of the Bank's Managing Directors, and Mark Malloch Brown, the Administrator of UNDP – not the Bank President or UN Secretary General, who would have needed to think much more about the political positioning of their organisation.

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<sup>50</sup> The exception was for the targets deriving from the World Summit for Children. UNICEF and WHO had already started work on the 'Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys' that eventually laid the basis for the ChildInfo system that the UN adapted into their DevInfo system for monitoring the MDGs.

It was Mark Malloch Brown's address that sparked off negotiations about the IDGs and what he called the 'Millennium Declaration Goals'. The main purpose of his talk was a subtle pitch to the Bank and IMF – the UN would accept IFI oversight of the national poverty reduction strategies of developing countries (PRSPs) if the IFIs would support the Millennium Declaration Targets – a precise listing of targets and indicators that would be derived from the Millennium Declaration by the UN Secretariat:

Just as the Bank and Fund have clear strengths in driving the PRSP process, I think the UN system can build on the real momentum of the Millennium summit and Declaration and play an invaluable role in helping develop a new campaign at global, national and even community level to monitor and benchmark outcomes (Malloch Brown, 2001: 3).

Colin Bradford, who had been involved in the meetings that led to the IDGs, felt that Malloch Brown was not outlining his proposal in full:

He was not only proposing a split in the road institutionally, but with the Bank giving prominence to the PRSPs (as opposed to the IDGs) and the UN giving prominence to the MDGs, the seven IDGS were being left out all together, or at the very least being relegated to a secondary position... (Bradford, 2006: 4).

Bradford was not the only person to notice this. As Malloch Brown finished, Howard Hjort, the FAO's representative, rose to comment:

I notice that Mark Malloch Brown has spoken of the consensus on the International Development Goals, but then went on to speak about the Millennium Goals. I am sure that everybody knows that there is a fundamental and significant difference between the Millennium Goals and the International Development Targets. My question is will the International Development Goals be modified... to conform to the Millennium Goals'? (Miller Reporting Company, 2001: 41-42).

Malloch Brown's response was dismissive of the IDGs:

...my view is that the International Development Goals were a step towards a process which has now culminated with a unique act of endorsement...at the Millennium Summit...my view is that it is a step back to a less universally, less high-level endorsed set of goals (ibid: 42-43).

He then explained some of the advantages of the MDGs.

Bradford responded to this with a defence of the IDGs:

...the advantage of the International Development Goals...is that they are few, they are concrete, they are monitorable, and they are achievable...I do think that it would be unwise for us to dicker about the differences between the Millennium Goals and the IDGs, but rather to think about them as one and the same thing. If necessary we could put together a task force which could attempt to reconcile the Goals...it doesn't take too much intellectual work to figure out how to make them concordant...what we don't want to do is to give on the outside, especially to our parliaments, any sense that we don't have our act pulled together behind something very, very clear and finite and specifically focused (ibid: 44-45).

Sitting in New York, Malloch Brown might be able to envisage a world with two sets of development goals, but sitting in Washington DC Bradford could not. With George W. Bush as President and a Republican Congress this would make it even easier for US politicians hostile to the idea of global poverty reduction to point out that the even the leading agencies could not agree on what they were trying to achieve. Brian Hammond and Paul Isenman came in to defend the IDGs, but Bradford had left the room to photocopy a handwritten note he had just penned that showed how easy 'concordance' would be (Table 1). He came back in and circulated this document.

**Table 1 'Concordance' – Reconciling the IDGs and Millennium Declaration Goals**

<b>International Development Goals</b>	<b>Millennium Declaration Goals</b>
1 Poverty reduction	1 Poverty reduction 2 Water 5 Slums 6 Digital [divide]
2 Universal primary education	2 Education: Universal primary education
3 Gender equality	3 Education: Gender gap
1 Infant and child mortality 2 Maternal mortality 3 Reproductive health	4 Health: HIV/AIDS 2 Water
7 Environment: Sustainable development	"A sustainable future: The environmental agenda"

Source: Colin Bradford, handwritten note.

What happened in the private negotiations at this meeting is not documented but, from later events, it is clear that agreements were reached. Malloch Brown's proposal that there be a clear division of labour between the IFIs (PRSPs) and the UN (Millennium Goals) was carried forward. Bradford's intervention, and informal suggestion, that a task force be set up to merge the two sets of goals also went forward – with members from

the DAC (representing OECD), World Bank, IMF and UNDP. When it reported it was presented as a purely technical committee. As Kofi Annan's *Road Map Towards the Implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration* (UN, 2001: 55) put it:

...consultations were held among members of the United Nations Secretariat and representatives of IMF, OECD and the World Bank in order to harmonize reporting on the development goals in the Millennium Declaration and the international development goals.

This authoritative listing was carefully qualified: 'The list of millennium development goals does not undercut in any way agreements on other goals and targets reached at the global conferences of the 1990s'. So, with the publication of a four-page annexe at the back of a 60-page document, the Millennium Development Goals were finally agreed – or at least almost agreed. There was a note saying that the indicators for Goal 7 (Ensure environmental sustainability) and Goal 8 (Develop a global partnership for development) were 'subject to further refinement'. These were the goals that most affected what the rich world was promising to achieve and it wanted some flexibility!

While the reconciliation of the IDGs and the Millennium Declaration Goals was presented as a technical exercise, this final negotiation was about real substance, and political considerations were cloaked as 'technical' discussions of goals, targets, indicators and data availability. Checking back with 'head office', in New York or Paris, was essential for delegates to ascertain how much change the UN and OECD member states (and powerful entities like the Vatican) would accommodate. As in the earlier listing processes there were some issues that lost ground and others that gained (or recovered lost) ground.

An examination of the Millennium Declaration and the IDGs (in their *Better World for All* format) reveals that the IDGs became the basis for the MDGs. Yet again, it was reproductive health that proved to be politically unacceptable (Hulme, 2009). It might have been an explicit goal in the DAC's IDGs, but the UN could not entertain such a concept because of the objections of a small part of its membership (see discussion in Section 2.7). With a conservative Christian President now in power in the US – George Bush – reproductive health was clearly out of favour. The compromise that was reached (an advance on the Millennium Declaration) was that 'improved maternal health' could be a goal in its own right. In what Colin Bradford<sup>51</sup> calls a 'fuzzy compromise', the HIV/AIDS goal included 'contraceptive prevalence rate' as an indicator – a partial compensation to the reproductive health lobby.

Other goals on the list were 'demoted' for reasons that related more closely to the technical considerations informing the concordance panel. The AIDS orphans goal in the

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<sup>51</sup> Interview, October 2006.



Declaration was converted into an indicator for halting the spread of HIV/AIDS. As the goals were meant to be few in number, there seemed little point in splitting the HIV/AIDS goal into two. Similarly, the Declaration's 'safe drinking water' goal was demoted to indicator status. This was logically matched by adding an indicator for improved sanitation, so that both sides of the water and sanitation sector were now included in the indicators.<sup>52</sup> The goal of improving the lives of 100 million slum dwellers was downgraded to a target under the environmental sustainability goal.

A number of other issues made progress during these 'technical' negotiations. The most significant addition was of Goal 8 – developing a global partnership for development. At the March 2001 meeting both World Bank and UN senior managers (Sven Sandstrom and Mark Malloch Brown) had remarked on the lack of an explicit goal 'holding the North accountable to levels of development assistance et cetera...'. The IDGs had included the issue of what rich countries should contribute to the global poverty reduction effort in a separate discussion in its document(s). Essential policy changes were identified, but these were not put forward for the scrutiny of formal monitoring and reporting. The Millennium Declaration had a discussion of these issues in its development and poverty eradication section, but again these had not been seen as something to turn into explicit goals. The technical team creating the final listing moved forward with great energy and the MDGs listing they produced set seven targets and 17 indicators for Goal 8. These covered increasing the quantity and improving the quality of official development assistance, improving market access for poor countries, debt relief, employment and access to technology and essential drugs. A caveat must be mentioned for these goals, however. While all of the other goals (1 to 7) were time-specific, there were no concrete dates set for any Goal 8 targets or indicators and many of the indicators did not include a quantitative target. This reflected the politics of the situation – the OECD countries were prepared to agree the directions they should be moving in, but they were not prepared as a group to set specific targets or agree dates for achievement. They wanted to keep their options open. Subsequently some OECD countries have unilaterally set themselves targets (for example EU member states have set dates for achieving the 0.7 percent of GNP as aid target), but others – most obviously the US – have assiduously kept clear of such commitments.

Finally, there were gains for the gender equality and women's empowerment goal. It became an explicit MDG (in the Millennium Declaration it was relegated to paragraph 20) and although the target was only framed in terms of educational access, the indicators now extended into economic life (women's share of non-agricultural wage employment) and politics (proportion of seats held by women in the national parliament). So, these

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<sup>52</sup> Without such an addition the goals would be in the foolish position of reporting a country that put all of its water and sanitation efforts only into 'clean water' as performing better than a country that made progress on both fronts – even though the latter might be making greater progress to ensuring the health of its people.

discussions between the OECD and UN achieved an improvement with regard to gender issues, compared to the Millennium Declaration.

In his first Millennium Summit follow-up report to the UN General Assembly on 6 September 2001, the Secretary General was able to report that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) had been specified. Most UN members subsequently started to refer to these goals and many used them as part of their policy and planning processes. The main exception to this was the US.<sup>53</sup>

Over the year since the Millennium Summit the prospects for a concerted push on global poverty reduction had weakened. In part this was probably inevitable – the Millennium fever that had helped fuel progress in 1999 and 2000 was now past. Most significant though was the change of President in the US. Power now rested with a neo-conservative President guided by a small group of neo-conservative advisors. Bush had hardly any foreign policy experience and neither he nor any of his advisors had been part of the IDG or MDG process. They were not ashamed to state that all of their decisions would be based purely on the US national interest and made this point forcefully by refusing to collaborate in international processes to curb climate change. For this administration, policy issues – such as global poverty reduction, universal primary education, foreign aid, debt relief and many others – were minor issues. They were highly suspicious of the UN, seeing it as an organisation that was probably anti-American, and viewed foreign aid as misguided enterprise doomed to failure. This was highly inauspicious for the approaching UN Finance for Development Conference that would celebrate the final listing of the MDGs. This meeting had been planned for 2001 but was delayed until March 2002. Two factors helped change that – one was catastrophic, the other was serendipitous.

The attack on the Twin Towers on 9/11 2001 had profound effects on the US, US international relations and even aspects of daily life in many parts of the world. For those concerned with global poverty reduction the consequences were manifold and still only partly understood. The short-term impact of this event on the progress of the MDGs was, perhaps surprisingly, positive. In its panic and haste to respond to this appalling event the Bush administration thought a little more than it had previously about 'soft power' approaches to foreign policy and there was more interest in the role of US foreign aid. One consequence of this was that the idea of increasing foreign aid did not have to be automatically dismissed without consideration.

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<sup>53</sup> The Bush administration's unwillingness to confirm the MDGs lasted for four years. As late as 26 August 2005 the US Ambassador to the UN, John Bolton, wrote to his peers and the press that the 'United States supports the development goals of the Millennium Declaration...[but the] "Millennium Development Goals"...are a [UN] Secretariat product, which member states never formally ratified'.

The second factor was that the Finance for Development meeting was in Monterrey and the Mexican President, Vicente Fox, was convenor. Bush had already said that Mexico was the US's most important foreign partner and had talked about his close links with Fox. This put pressure on him to show up at the global event to which his 'friend', President Fox, was inviting him. And, maybe there should be some new thinking on the strategic role of foreign aid in US foreign policy in the light of 9/11. Other actors (Bono, Christian conservatives, etc.) also encouraged Bush to go to Monterrey – and once there he could not be the only leader not to show his generosity. Bush announced he was going to Monterrey at the last moment and, at the FFD meeting, he surprised his critics by announcing a new programme – the Millennium Challenge Account – that would increase US foreign aid by US\$5 billion per annum. So, while the commitments made at Monterrey were well below the levels talked about in 2000, and many donors had caveats around their aid increases, overall the Finance for Development Conference was a success. The MDGs were informally approved there (even if not formally ratified). They were now ready for implementation.<sup>54</sup>

### **3 Understanding the making of the MDGS**

The processes involved in making the MDGs can be understood using the concepts of global public policy. First, the making of the MDGs was an on-going process with no precise beginning and end and without clear 'stages' for identification, formulation, assessment and implementation – these stages were interwoven in different ways at different times. For example, although the Children's Summit was foundational to the formation of the MDGs, it had antecedents in the earlier UN conferences, the UN Development Decades and books and reports about international development. It must also be noted that at the Children's Summit no-one knew that they were on a route heading to the MDGs. The idea of an authoritative list of specified poverty reduction goals did not arise until 1995 and the idea of using the Millennium as the means to engineer a global consensus around a list of goals came a year or two later. We also have to note that there is no clear end to the different stages of MDG evolution. A narrow account might argue that the goals were set formally at the Millennium Assembly. But that listing was later significantly revised to produce the MDGs in September 2001.

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<sup>54</sup> For a discussion of the implementation processes, especially the Millennium Project and Millennium Campaign, and the 2005 decision by the UN General Assembly to include reproductive health and decent work in the MDGs see Hulme (2010).

Even that 'final' agreement has been amended, with the addition of targets for reproductive health and decent work.<sup>55</sup> One must also suspect, and perhaps hope, that the present MDGs are only the first of an evolving series of lists for the 21st century, each of which will become more coherent and gain greater support from UN member states and global civil society. The 'ins and outs' that have been iterated during the MDG process must also be noted. Infant, child and maternal mortality have been in and out and then back in the evolving lists. There is also no clear separation between goal formulation and planning and implementation. Most goals were pursued in some way immediately after the specific conferences that approved them – well before the Millennium Project's plans for MDG achievement were launched in 2005 the goals were already being targeted in many countries through plans of action.

Second, the MDGs have been developed through multiple channels and have not followed any clearly defined or pre-identified or formally established development and sanctioning process. Elements of the actual process have at times approached the normative ideals (for some) of global governance. This occurred most clearly when the 189 members of the UN approved the Millennium Declaration. But there were many other channels – negotiations among OECD countries at the DAC; international coalitions of NGOs in gender, reproductive health, education, HIV/AIDS and other issues; multinational corporations lobbying trade ministries and national leaders about the dangers of regulating pharmaceutical prices or the patenting of genetic resources; and the alliance to block reproductive health goals operated by an unlikely group of allies (the Vatican, Sudan, Libya and Iran). Charting the number and nature of these channels defies possibility – only the major channels can be charted.

At different times different actors have taken leadership of the MDG evolution process. Initially, it was the UN conferences and summits passing the baton of leadership from chairperson to chairperson. In the mid-1990s, leadership (and the locus for debate and compromise) transferred to the OECD's DAC and, for a period, actors in the UK (Short, Brown and DFID) and Northern Europe (the Utstein Group and their agencies) took on the role of promoting the MDG idea (in the guise of the IDGs, as they were then). In the late 1990s leadership passed clearly to the UN Secretariat and the UN General Assembly. The Secretariat devoted itself to the drafting of preparatory documents for the 2000 Assembly and later the Millennium Declaration. This entailed drafting the poverty goals within the Declaration in negotiation with the UN member states and other parties. For a short period the Millennium Summit put leadership of the emerging MDGs in the hands of the Secretary General and the General Assembly.

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<sup>55</sup> These additions were agreed at the UN General Assembly in 2005, but it took a further three years for their technical specification.

In 2001 the lead changed hands again and a task force from the UN, OECD, World Bank and IMF conducted the final technical and political negotiations to produce the list formally entitled 'the Millennium Development Goals'. In the early implementation phase, the World Bank, with national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, and the UN, with Jeffrey Sachs' global Millennium Project proposals, jostled to lead the effort. Now there are so many players and new organisations (Global Fund, GAVI, Gates Foundation) that listing their acronyms has become almost unfeasible. These changes in leadership of the evolutionary process for the MDGs have been very important. When the main channel has been the General Assembly, issues such as reproductive health and gender equality have been marginalised. When the international civil servants of the multilaterals (2001) or the DAC (1995-1996) have been the main channel for progress then these issues have fared better. General Assembly involvement has favoured a focus on the goals for rich countries, while DAC leadership has not prioritised such targets. Organisational cultures are also important – when the UN Secretariat is leading then documents tend to take on a broader human rights flavour. When DAC has been engaged then the documents focus much more on precise specifications and measurement and results-based management moves to the forefront (Hulme, 2008).

Third, negotiation and bargaining – sometimes directly and sometimes through intermediaries – have been at the heart of the process throughout. Sometimes these are undertaken to win – as in 2000, when the 'unholy' alliance sought to exclude, and succeeded in excluding, mention of reproductive health in *We the Peoples*. At other times compromise is the goal, as in 2001, when officials from the UN, World Bank and IMF negotiated with OECD countries and DAC over Goal 8. The rich countries agreed to goals and targets for the contributions they would make for MDG achievement as long as these were weakly specified (few quantitative targets) and not time bound. However, as indicated in the first point in this section, no deal is necessarily final – at some future stage agreements can be revisited and revised.

Fourth, in the negotiations about the evolving MDGs, the power of different actors (individuals, groups, organisations, networks, states and groups of states) varies greatly, depending on the power the actor can wield (economic, political, moral and even military) and the coalitions and alliances they can build. The US – the world's only superpower – could have driven the process ahead more rapidly, and might have changed the content – but, for the US, global poverty reduction was only a footnote on its foreign policy and did not demand attention from the top. The US kept a careful eye on Goal 7 (environmental sustainability) and Goal 8 (rich country targets) but never took the lead that it could have done on other issues. The US position – enormous power but rarely applied – contrasted with the UK position. The personal commitment of an energetic development minister (Clare Short) and finance minister (Gordon Brown), supported by an effective bureaucracy and considerable support from the British public –

meant that the UK was able to advance the goal-setting process well above the influence it might have been expected to exercise.

At the opposite extreme, a UN observer state, such as the Vatican, could take the lead in blocking a potential MDG goal that had considerable support from many member states, NGOs and professionals, by networking with a small number of concerned G77 states. The G77's *modus operandi*, requiring a consensus, meant that a tiny minority of its members could impose their preference on the majority.

At a deeper level, the structures of global capitalism can be seen as shaping the MDGs (Saith, 2006). At no time did the debates around the UN conferences of the 1990s, the IDGs, the Millennium Declaration or the MDGs attempt to challenge the market economy in a significant way. They could discuss trade reform and debt relief in terms of changes and improvements, but not in terms of any fundamental changes to the overarching system. Such matters were for other fora – WTO, G7/G8 the OECD – in which the US, and other powerful entities, the EU, China and India would flex their muscles. All of these could be ambivalent about Goals 1 to 6 of the MDGs, but would keep a careful eye on issues such as trade, global environmental change and redesigning the international financial architecture.

Fifth, as has been widely argued for other sectors (Keeley and Scoones, 2003), the creation of a policy narrative can greatly help to advance a policy or set of ideas. In the early stages of MDG evolution, the UN conferences, the arguments were highly specific – if we pursue this goal we can improve children's health or improve the social status of women or reduce biodiversity loss. Following the creation of the IDGs the message became more powerful, as personified in the narrative that Clare Short presented and repeated (as did her colleagues in the Utstein Group) – 'if we all pursue these goals then we can reduce poverty by half by 2015'. This was a simple mantra – critics said it was simplistic, but that is usually the case with policy narratives – but it worked very effectively with other politicians and with the public. By late 2000 it was being propagated by the UN Secretary-General, most of the rich world's ministers for international development, many heads of state or government and vast numbers of NGOs. By 2001 and 2002 it was being transmitted to new audiences by Bono and other celebrities and by leading economists, such as Jeffrey Sachs. By 2005 it had become the narrative behind the 'Make Poverty History' and 'One' campaigns. Part of the process of simplification is that those who deliver the narrative have to stretch the available evidence so that the linkages between actions and results are presented as highly predictable, in fact virtually guaranteed, if the actions are pursued. The strength of the narrative comes from this simplification, but there is the danger, particularly if the promised results are at the upper end of best case scenarios, that the gap between the narrative and the achievements is exposed at an early stage.

Finally, while much of what happened in the process of the making of the MDGs can be seen as rooted in the existing structures of economic, social and political power, both within and between countries, we must also note that sometimes opportunities for individuals (or small groups of people) can shape the direction that events take. There are opportunities for human agency. Sometimes these focus on the promulgation of ideas – as with Nafis Sadik and the thousands of women’s health advocates who advanced the case for reproductive health. At other times they are more serendipitous, as with Colin Bradford’s ‘appearances’ – waving down Jan Pronk in a car park to advance the idea of setting up a DAC *Groupe de Réflexion* in 1995 and coming up with an impassioned plea (and a hastily written note) to help steer the UN and OECD towards ‘concordance’ with their two sets of development goals. These outcomes could well have happened without Bradford, but still they indicate the ways in which personal action can help to take an idea forward.

At a more macro level there was the serendipity, for MDG evolution, of Clare Short becoming Secretary of State for International Development in the UK in 1997. She was planning on being the next Minister of Transport, but Tony Blair decided not to trust her with that portfolio. So, she took International Development as a booby prize, and became the UK’s most effective development minister ever (in terms of international influence, talking her budget up, strengthening the reputation of her department in the UK and other countries). Perhaps one tends to hear of the ‘good news’ tales of serendipity more than one hears of the ‘bad news’ of accidents. There is a downside, but it is harder to track down. It might be illustrated by the untimely death of Jim Grant – what a powerful advocate he would have been for the MDG evolution process. Similarly, the fact that Sudan had a female representative to talk against reproductive health and women’s empowerment helped to strengthen the case against these issues.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has provided a chronological account of the evolution of the MDGs, from their historical antecedents to the Monterrey Consensus of 2002 that agreed that the economically advanced and developing countries would pursue them as a common framework for international development. It has revealed the vast number of different actors involved in attempting to create authoritative lists of global goals and the varying roles they have played – associations of states, multilateral organisations, rich and poor governments, and agencies, NGOs, faiths, social management – their relative coherence seems remarkable given the ‘chaos of accidents and purposes’ (Clay and Schaffer, 1984) from which they arose. While they are commonly presented as deriving from technical and empirical analysis, in truth they are the product of intense political negotiation informed by analytical work. As the time draws near for the appraisal of MDG

achievement, at the UN General Assembly in September 2010, and discussions about 'what comes after the MDGs', it is useful to reflect on the processes that created the world's biggest promise.

## **Appendix 1 – The International Development Goals**

1. **Economic wellbeing:** The proportion of people living in extreme poverty in developing countries should be reduced by at least one-half by 2015.
2. **Social development:** There should be substantial progress in primary education, gender equality, basic health care and family planning, as follows:
  - a) There should be universal primary education in all countries by 2015.
  - b) Progress toward gender equality and the empowerment of women should be demonstrated by eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005.
  - c) The death rate for infants and children under the age of five years should be reduced in each developing country by two-thirds the 1990 level by 2015. The rate of maternal mortality should be reduced by three-fourths during this same period.
  - d) Access should be available through the primary health-care system to reproductive health services for all individuals of appropriate ages, including safe and reliable family planning methods, as soon as possible and no later than the year 2015.
3. **Environmental sustainability and regeneration:** There should be a current national strategy for sustainable development, in the process of implementation, in every country by 2005, so as to ensure that current trends in the loss of environmental resources – forests, fisheries, fresh water, climate, soils, biodiversity, stratospheric ozone, the accumulation of hazardous substances and other major indicators – are effectively reversed at both global and national levels by 2015.

*Source:* DAC (1996), pp. 9-11.



## **Appendix 2 – The Millennium Development Goals**

### **Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**

Target 1: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day.

Target 2: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

### **Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education**

Target 3: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

### **Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women**

Target 4: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education no later than 2015.

### **Goal 4: Reduce child mortality**

Target 5: Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate.

### **Goal 5: Improve maternal health**

Target 6: Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio.

### **Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases**

Target 7: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Target 8: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

### **Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability**

Target 9: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources.

Target 10: Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water.

Target 11: By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

**Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development**

Target 12: Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system.

Target 13: Address the special needs of the least developed countries.

Target 14: Address the special needs of landlocked countries and small island developing states.

Target 15: Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long term.

Target 16: In cooperation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth.

Target 17: In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable, essential drugs in developing countries.

Target 18: In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications.

*Source:* UN (2001), pp. 56-58.

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