

Ideas in International Agendas: the Millennium Development Goals

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‘Ideas matter’

- Joseph Stiglitz – Ideas have played an important role in shaping policies.
- David Hulme – International development reframed as ending global poverty
- Revive poverty reduction by shifting from setting targets to diffusing a social norm, a value.

*“The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and **when they are wrong**, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist.”*

John Maynard Keynes, 1936,
*The General Theory of Employment,
Interest and Money*

Social and political life of ideas

- Widely held assumption that ethical commitments drive behaviour of individuals, groups and states – e.g. human rights; or that new better ideas at solving problems triumph, e.g. Keynesianism (Hall 1989)
- Why do some ideas influence on policy and not others?
- Who uses ideas for what purpose and what happens to ideas as they are used – how are they interpreted, reinterpreted, distorted?
- Powerful ideas – transformative – ‘paradigm change’ in the way people see the world

Significance of MDGs – major shift in ideas not a new strategy

- Reframing international development as ending global poverty.
- **Reconceptualizes:**
 - Purpose of development – economic and social transformation
 - Role of international community – support countries, reduce inequalities *between* countries
 - Shared goals (without consensus on path to get there)
 - **Implications:**
 - Policy priorities?
 - Shift in paradigm – human development and capability approach?

Origins of the MDGs: 1990s politics

- Protests over structural adjustment loans: Washington Consensus policy impact on people; conditionalities of SALs.
- DAC/IDGs – declining support for aid and need for new post Cold War discourse on aid to convince ‘parliaments and publics’ of the donor countries.
- Inclusive globalization agendas of UN development conferences of the 1990s with large participation of Southern governments and NGO networks .

Key ideas *motivating* MD/MDGs

- Global solidarity and responsibility for poverty
- Inclusive globalization – benefits shared among people and countries; reduce inequalities within and between countries
- Participation, empowerment, democratic governance as essential *means* to ending poverty
- Understanding of poverty: multidisciplinary, human experience, human agency, politics (HDRs, WDR2000)
- Theoretical approach: human development/capability approach; language of rights

Policy agendas in MDG era

- Strategies being implemented: macroeconomic stabilization, neoliberal market reforms, economic governance , + social investments, social protection (reviews of PRSPs, DAC aid allocations). Selective cherry picking of 8 goals and 60 indicators.
- Strategies not being implemented: pro-poor growth (e.g. employment), systemic reforms in global economy, democratic governance, gender empowerment (e.g. political participation)
- Policy agendas left out: development as national transformation, reducing inequality between countries

Haiti: ODA COMMITMENTS by Category of Assistance (constant 2006 USD Millions)

OECD Stats Extract Aid Activities Dataset <<http://webnet.oecd.org/wbos/index.aspx>> Retrieved 23 March, 2009

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Total ODA, All Donors	227.4	443.4	413.4	1 072.3	589.4	624.0
Social Infrastructure and Services	123.2	116.4	205.0	422.4	401.3	321.8 (52%)
Economic Infrastructure and Services	2.1	5.1	47.1	97.6	39.4	44.9 (7%)
Productive Sectors	6.7	59.0	3.4	79.7	40.9	12.4 (2%)
Multi-sector / Cross-Cutting	41.1	82.1	19.4	85.5	26.4	38.6 (6%)
General Budget Support	..	80.0	0.0	63.7	12.8	56.9 (9%)
Food Aid and Food Security	47.3	48.4	40.6	42.2	40.3	40.9 (7%)
ODA to Action Relating to Debt	0.9	0.9	15.6	17.0	0.8	53.2 (9%)
ODA to Humanitarian Aid	3.5	49.1	78.5	201.4	22.6	50.0 (8%)

MDG Narrative in new aid architecture

- Rationale for aid: humanitarian, not an investment in productive capacity. ('A Faustian Bargain')
- Development strategy: continued liberalization, stabilization, institutional reforms.
- Financing mechanism: PRSP, PRGF, HIPC replace PFPs and SALs.
- Macroeconomic conditionality: ex post incentive systems for 'good economic management' replaces 'ex ante'. Increased policy space for recipients.
- Development perspective: orthodox economic perspective dominates, coopts the normative framework of the human centered perspectives but not the policy strategies.

Reframing the role of the international community

- Responsibility for global poor replaces responsibility for post-colonial development
- Assistance to people, not countries
- Emergence of aid priorities and modalities targetted at people bypassing the state
- Risk of weakening already fragile states in LDCs
- Reinforce global power structures
- False sense of consensus, incentive for self-censorship

Missing agendas in new framework

- Development
- National strategies
- Developmental state
- Developmentalism
- Systemic reforms in global institutions (climate change, financial institutions, Doha round, etc)
- Productivity, employment
- Pro-poor growth
- Complexity in development
- Theory, moral reasoning, ideology
- Dissenting policy approaches

Process of MDG creation and internalisation

- Driven by UN 38th floor
- Search to unite divided international community and assert UN leadership
- Alliance with Uttstein group bilat ministers
- Use the 'magic of numbers' as instrument
- Initial opposition from civil society networks ('Most Distracting Gimmick')
- Lukewarm support from developing countries

Ideas as political instruments in international development

- Shape narratives
- Distort theories, concepts
- Are used for institutional objectives
- Are used selectively
- Interact with economic and political interests
- Reinforce power structures

Power of numbers as tools of governance

- Communicate complex, ambitious, intangible concepts – ‘poverty’, ‘development’, ‘freedom’, ‘dignity’, ‘solidarity’ - with simplicity and concreteness.
- Communicate objectives with aura of scientific precision
- Instrument for direct control as norms, benchmarks, planning
- Instrument for indirect control by encouraging self-regulation

- Fukuda-Parr, Sakiko and David Hulme, “International Norm Dynamics and ‘the End of Poverty’: Understanding the Millennium Development Goals” *Global Governance (forthcoming)*
- Fukuda-Parr, Sakiko “Theory and policy in international development: human development and capability approach and the millennium development goals” *International Studies Review (forthcoming)*
- Fukuda-Parr, Sakiko “Reducing Inequality: The missing MDG”, *IDS Bulletin* 2009 special issue on MDGs