

# **GLOBAL PUBLIC POLICY AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs): A SHORT HISTORY OF THE WORLD'S BIGGEST PROMISE (19.06.07)**

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## **Abstract**

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. This paper describes the processes leading to the evolution of the MDGs and analyses them through the lens of global public policy. The complexity and messiness of this process (in 2001 it looked as though there might be two different sets of goals) makes it surprising that such a relatively coherent set of goals was eventually agreed. The conclusion argues that while the MDGs were produced out of a mix of moral vision and realpolitik their longer term legacy may be to promote a moral vision, and constrain opportunities for the pursuit of self-interest, in future attempts to reduce global poverty. However, these effects are dependent on the ways in which public attitudes change and this is strongly influenced by the ways in which the media will frame MDG performance as we move towards 2015.

## **Note for the Reader**

Apologies for the length of this paper – it's a condensed version of a longer paper but is still too long! If you want to read the details of the evolution of the MDGs look at section 3. If you want an analysis of these processes (without all the detail) read section 4.

**Please do not quote without my permission as there are some bits of detail I need to check.**

## **Acknowledgments**

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# **GLOBAL PUBLIC POLICY AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs): A SHORT HISTORY OF THE WORLD'S BIGGEST PROMISE (18.06.07)**

**David Hulme, University of Manchester**

‘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 misinterpretation of the MDGs...has tangible consequences. Nothing is more disempowering than to be called a poor performer when one is doing a perfectly respectable job. The real enemies of the global anti-poverty agenda are pessimism, scepticism and cynicism...global targets such as the MDGs have their place but they also need to be kept in place’ (Vandemoortele 2007:6-7)

‘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 2004 and 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 (Vandemoortele 2007); 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 2004; Collier 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, human rights 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 lenses, make projections about their potential outcomes and consequences. In this paper I take a 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 and may offer practical insights to those involved in MDG implementation or seeking to influence future global mega-promises (and there will be more of them). To do this I use an analytical framework from the emerging field of 'global public policy'.

This 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. Instead it views them as a particular moment in a longer term process trying to promote the reduction of poverty and human deprivation as a global value that shapes individual, group, organisational, national and international behaviours and actions. The MDGs are not merely a final product to be praised or revised or put aside. Rather they are work in progress that are 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>1</sup> we also need to think about how to shape global goals, global visions and global promises in the future.

## **2 GLOBAL PUBLIC POLICY**

Global public policy (GPP) is an emerging concept that seeks to integrate theoretical elements from the fields of globalisation and public policy (Reinecke 1998; Stone 2006). Given the significant contestations within both of these literatures it must be recognised that the elaboration of global public policy is work in progress. This is important work, however, as new forms of global public policy are constantly surfacing or transforming – environmental, security and arms, internet regulation, international standards, finance and banking (to name but a few).

Within the field of globalisation GPP relates most closely to ideas about 'global governance'. However, the bulk of that literature focuses on critiques of, and proposals for redesign of, regional and global institutions. Commonly it has a normative orientation and strives to identify how global institutions can be made more accountable. 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 Shaffer 1984) that, alongside deeper structural forces, shapes policy processes such as the evolution of the MDGs. Beneath the public documents, pronouncements and speeches that present policy as a smoothly functioning machine, this approach seeks to explain the complexity and contingency of what really happens. This permits a deeper understanding of the tensions involved in pursuing internationalism in a system still based on the concept of national sovereignty (Kennedy 2006).

At its simplest '...globalisation denotes the expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up and deepening impact of interregional flows and patterns of social interaction...a shift or transformation in the scale of human organisation that links distant communities and expands the reach of power relations across the world' (Held and McGrew 2004:4). As more issues become cross-border concerns, as international communications have become extraordinarily low cost and efficient with the

development of ICTs, as markets have opened up and the unit costs of international transport have reduced then flows of goods, capital, people, technology and ideas have increased at unprecedented rates and the relative power of the nation-state has declined. Castells interprets this as leading to a world in which the impact of social movements [and other structures] ‘...on society rarely stems from a concerted strategy, masterminded by a center’ (Vol 2:362). This is certainly the case for the MDGs.

While there are many accounts of the ways in which power relations have reconfigured in a globalising, post-Cold War context – ranging from accounts of the ‘death’ of the nation-state to those who retain a realist position – the analysis in this paper is close to the concept of ‘complex interdependence’ (Keohane and Nye 1989; Keohane 1996). This has three main characteristics.

- 1 Multiple channels connect societies through interstate (nation-state to nation-state), transgovernmental and transnational links (between non-state actors). These include informal ties between government elites as well as formal ties between governments; informal and formal ties between NGO elites; and, connections between transnational businesses such as MNCs.
- 2 The interstate connections range across multiple issues and there is no clearly set hierarchy among issues. While military security has become more significant since 9/11 it does not always dominate relations, as it did during the Cold War, and other issues (trade, human rights, environment, energy security) have risen in significance. This has complicated interstate relations as they now commonly involve several different parts of government (foreign affairs, agriculture, trade, environment, science and technology) and policy coordination may be weak<sup>ii</sup>. Different issues are pursued by different coalitions, both ‘for’ and ‘against’ – governmental and non-governmental, domestic and international. Sovereignty may be viewed as ‘...a bargaining resource for a politics characterised by complex transnational networks’ (Held).
- 3 Military force is only one of several options and is often irrelevant [and I would argue sometimes counter-productive] in resolving tensions about economic issues, migration and the environment.

A fourth characteristic should be added to Keohane’s listing.

- 4 Nation-states have varying degrees of power and influence but, at the present time we live in a uni-polar world where the USA has the potential to play a hegemonic role in relation to many issues. This includes its capacity to unilaterally withdraw itself from negotiations over key issues, such as global warming for 2000-2006. This unipolarity means that the USA can treat some key global issues purely in terms of its domestic political agenda.

A number of other ideas can be drawn from the public policy literature to assist in the analysis of the evolution of the MDGs. These come from two different traditions within this field – ‘the science of muddling through’ (Lindblom 1959; Clay and Shaffer 1984) and discourse analysis (Foucault 1981).

- 1 The evolution of public policy can 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 programmed or accidental ‘trigger events’. As

Keeley and Scoones (2003:34) express it: ‘...often serendipity, contingency and chance are important elements in policy change’.

2 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 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>iii</sup>.

3 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. In recent times this has re-emerged as ‘evidence-based policy’ promising that politicians have selected the best policy and relieving them of responsibility for policy outcomes. The presentation of policies as emerging out of this linear-rational process is itself an important element of discourse.

4 The literature on policy making highlights the importance of examining both policy formulation and implementation and not treating them as distinct.

Stone (2006) has mustered many of these ideas together in a recent paper building on the work of Novotny 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 are:

‘...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<sup>iv</sup> as in inter-governmental conferences’.

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.

### **3 MAKING THE WORLD’S BIGGEST PROMISE: THE MGD STORY**

#### ***3.1 Antecedents***

The MDGs were not simply an end of Millennium phenomena. The idea of a systematic attempt to eradicate or dramatically reduce global poverty has antecedents that go back to the founding of the UN; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the stalled Development Decade of the 1960s, with its goals for foreign aid volumes and growth rates, that President Kennedy lead (for a short time); the many UN summits of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (that set global goals for reducing hunger, improving health, eradicating diseases and schooling children); and, books

and reports and associated advocacy exercises on the issue (Brandt 1980; Galbraith 1979; Myrdal 1970; Shonfield 1960; Wilson 1953).

However, around 1980, with the arrival of Reagan and Thatcher, the intellectual ascendancy of neo-liberal ideas around the world, and the shift of responsibility/authority for reducing poverty from the UN to the IFIs with their prescription of structural adjustment, the promotion of the idea of a concerted public effort at global poverty reduction stalled. Thatcher (1993:168-70) took pride not only in blocking the 'wrong headed' talk of Brandt's North-South dialogue but also in bringing to an halt UN conferences and summits. Poverty did not need targeting – the world just needed to focus on getting the prices right and poverty would disappear. Fortunately, at least for the idea of global poverty reduction, the era of the counter-revolution did not stamp out all alternative courses and by the late 1980s senior figures in the UN system were laying plans for a new generation of UN summits.

### ***3.2 UN Summitry Returns in 1990***

While one needs to be cautious at identifying turning points as decades open or close, 1990 did mark a change in the evolution of ideas about poverty reduction. Against the backdrop of the end of the Cold War it saw the *World Development Report 1990* that recognised the need for economic reform to be accompanied by social policies (education and gender) and the first of the UNDP's *Human Development Reports*. 1990 was also the year of the Children's Summit in New York to which the process leading up to the MDGs can be traced.

The Children's Summit achieved its specific goals, of mobilising public support and political commitment and setting concrete targets to improve the prospects of the world's children. In addition, it re-energised and re-activated the notion that global summits could produce concrete improvements in human welfare – even Time Magazine reached this conclusion. While some summits might be caricatured as glorified talking shops (the Education Summit at Jomtien in the same year may fall into this category), Jim Grant's leadership and careful planning<sup>v</sup> of the Children's Summit showed that this did not have to be the case. As soon as the Summit was over Grant set about pushing for plans of action at country level to ensure that implementation took place. He travelled the world meeting with national leaders to ask them about their progress and tasked UNICEF field staff with the responsibility of ensuring that goals converted into national plans of action.

The Earth Summit at Rio in 1992 took full note of this and produced a vibrant event that achieved high media coverage and public recognition and raised the awareness of the links between the environment and contemporary and future poverty. However, it did also reveal that now the Cold War was over the US could operate as a G1 – separating itself from the G7 and other groupings and going it alone if it wanted. With other rich nations observing the US position, the summit also revealed the deepening North-South divide on how to manage global environmental problems. The rich countries, with the US in pole position, favoured technological solutions and fought against a Southern position that argued for reduced consumption in the North alongside debt reduction, trade reform, MNC regulation and increased official development assistance. Rio's Agenda 21 is a vast document typical of the long winded and often incoherent documentation that is produced when fractious inter-governmental negotiations produce a final declaration.

The World Conference on Human Rights of 1993 in Vienna reaffirmed the principles that were to underpin the MDGs, and in particular advanced the recognition of the rights of women. But, by its very nature it, steered clear of generating the prioritised and quantified targets that goal setting demands. Rights based and needs based approaches to poverty reduction are not always comfortable bed fellows.

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994 had great significance for the process of MDG evolution as the agreements it reached were to generate more heated debates and backroom negotiations and deals than any other issue. It departed radically from the population control and family planning agendas of the two earlier population conferences. After heated debates between government officials, professionals, social activists and religious groups (and particularly powerful work by reproductive health and women's NGO networks) its plan of action confirmed a strategy based on reproductive rights for all and seeking to give women greater control of their reproductive and sexual lives. It set time bound targets for reductions in child, infant and maternal mortality and for access to reproductive health services for all. This was against the wishes of a number of conservative Islamic countries, it offended the Holy See and was a source of concern for conservative Christian groups in the US.

The peak year for UN summitry was in 1995 with the World Summit on Social Development (WSSD) in Copenhagen and the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing six months later. The Copenhagen Summit was crucial for the MDGs as it was here that a global consensus emerged that poverty reduction was the priority goal for development (UNDP 1997:108). It approved the target of eradicating global income consumption poverty (\$1 a day poverty as it came to be known) by 2015 and reaffirmed the agreements reached at the Children's Summit and the ICPD. It set both goals for economic well-being and for social development recognising that poverty was multi-dimensional and that a multi-dimensional approach would be needed to reduce it. While radicals of the left saw this as a sell out – an acceptance that global capitalism would be the mechanism that would deliver the resources for global poverty reduction – for many on the centre left and centre right this was a 'consensus' with which they could concur. The agreement at Copenhagen had particular impact and legitimacy as 117 heads of state and government attended it – the largest meeting of 'heads' that there had ever been.

In the same year the Women's Summit at Beijing – very much driven by the feminist social movement that had evolved over the 1980s and early 1990s – reaffirmed the goals of gender equality and women's empowerment. It was a vibrant and energetic meeting with many delegates seeing the time as ripe for broader strategies of empowerment and social transformation (Eyben 2006). However, the energy and drive of the conference was not matched by its ultimate impact on global goal setting exercises. Its focus was more on rights than goals and having two conferences in the same year proved disastrous for the Women's Conference as is revealed by its delegate structure. Only two heads of state turned up at Beijing and country leads were commonly Ministers of Women's Affairs or Welfare. Those with national political power – presidents, prime ministers, finance and foreign ministers – could confirm their support for the Beijing Declaration, but it was the Copenhagen Agenda that was taken forward.

UN summits continued in the latter half of the 1990s but many participants, both official and from advocacy groups, report that ‘summit fatigue’ had set in. The enormous amount of time and energy required to participate in these events was becoming a cause for concern in the UN, in the ministries of member states and for NGOs. The agora for global goal setting was about to shift from these vast and diverse UN jamborees that moved from continent to continent to much smaller formalised meetings – mainly of men from industrialised countries – centred on Paris. This was not part of some grand plan – it was just the way things worked out.

### ***3.3 From Summits to Lists: the OECD’s DAC Takes the Lead***

In the mid-1990s aid agencies around the world had a big problem. With only a few exceptions their budgets as a share of GDP were in decline and total levels of official development assistance (ODA) were in long term decline. 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 USA, was committed to a ‘... number one priority...’ of reducing the US fiscal deficit (Clinton 200?: 453) 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.

For the donor club, the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC),<sup>vi</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 publicly defending their organisations and downsizing. The environment for aid was not propitious. Critics on the right, and especially Jesse Helms in the USA, were arguing aid was a waste of time. On the left, aid had a very negative image after the experience of structural adjustment. The ‘50 years is enough’ campaign, against the World Bank and IMF, had been popular with many OECD publics. The atmosphere at the Chateau de la Muette for the DAC 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>vii</sup>.

At the meeting the delegates approved a document that had been produced over the last year *Development Partnership in the New Global Context* (OECD 1995a). 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 reflexion* 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 reflexion* 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 but discussion soon moved to the next agenda item. Jim Michel, chair of DAC, seemed reluctant to pursue the *Groupe de reflexion* idea. This may have been because DAC had just gone through an exercise to produce and achieve agreement on



the *Development Partnerships* document . Whatever, '[t]he meeting ended with support for the idea but with no implementation plan' (Bradford 2006: 2).

Then 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 reflexion*. Pronk agreed so Bradford turned around and went back to 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 reflexion* was launched at a breakfast meeting of the OECD 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 and 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. This listing became a central 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 visions). The idea of setting targets had become a common device for reforms in OECD public services and it appealed to the US, UK, Germany and Norway which had begun to use 'logical frameworks'. 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>viii</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. The US delegate argued against this as the terms 'poverty' and 'poverty reduction' created suspicion and antipathy from politicians and the public in the USA. More concrete goals, such as getting children into school and stopping children and mothers from dieing , were what they needed. Going for a broad set of goals would give the list a form of democratic legitimacy, as they were 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>ix</sup> NGOs made good allies and bad enemies. 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>x</sup> and the 'social development' goals would be subsumed under a single

heading. As a result moneymetric view of poverty reduction headed a list of three mega-goals.

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 gender equality in the education sector.

The third issue concerns a UN Summit goal that failed to enter the IDG listing. The 20/20 initiative that was proposed in the *Human Development Report 1992* and agreed at the WSSD in 1995 was notably absent from the DAC document. This called on national governments in developing countries to allocate around 20% of their public expenditure to basic social services and on aid donors to match this by allocating 20% 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 several, but it is clear that both aid donors and national treasuries resented any attempt to 'tie their hands'.

Intense negotiations at the last two *Groupe* meetings in Tokyo (March 17-21 1996) and the Hague (April 2-4 1996) reached agreement on the final document. All DAC members were prepared to sign up to the seven<sup>xi</sup> specific commitments in the document and to the 'qualitative factors', such as stable, safe, participatory and just societies, human rights and 'partnerships' described in the text. At the HLM of Ministers of Development Cooperation of 6-7 May 1996 *Shaping the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Contribution of Development Co-operation* was launched. This document and event was immediately successful in terms of attracting media attention in Europe and the USA. The *International Herald Tribune* ran a 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, as its architects had intended, it could be easily summarised by a simple listing of its seven 'International Development Goals' (IDGs).<sup>xii</sup>

### **3.4 THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS: RECEPTION 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 set 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 2002a: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 21<sup>st</sup> 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. 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 more powerful donors (USA, Japan, UK,

France) and the multilateral institutions. 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 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 documents promises and promotion of ‘partnership’ sounded like standard aid agency rhetoric. 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 IFIs changing their policies.

The responses of the major multilaterals varied. For the UN the report and the IDGs had significance (see next section). The IDGs registered in several parts of the World Bank, especially PREM where several staff were pushing for the Bank to see poverty as multi-dimensional rather than purely in income/consumption terms<sup>xiii</sup>. One clear impact was the launch in 1997 of the Bank’s *Global Monitoring Report* featuring the IDGs as a monitoring framework (Bradford 2002a:5). This reflected the Bank’s comparative advantage – rigorously collating and analysing statistics – and also reinforced its ownership of the agenda on measuring development. The IDGs barely registered at the IMF. While it was recognising that it would have to engage with the poverty reduction agenda uncoded lists of desirable but expensive goals did not appeal.

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. 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 part of the targets. For issue-based NGOs the response depended on the treatment of their issue. Save the Children might be pleased with UPE and reduced child and infant mortality goals but there was little in the IDGs for the older persons that HelpAge International assists. 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 UN declarations, not the OECD’s list, were the foci.

### **3.5 THE UN AND THE IDGs**

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. 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 were determining 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>xiv</sup>.

While agencies such as UNICEF were happy to see universal primary education, parity for girls in primary education and reductions in infant and child mortality goals repeated, they could also note that the Convention on the Rights of the Child was not mentioned. At UNIFEM there was deep dissatisfaction with the modesty of the gender goal. *The Human Development Report 1997* provides some insights into UNDP's and the UN Secretariat's response to the IDGs. Chapter 6 examines 'Eradicating human poverty worldwide – an agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> century'. This chapter, around the same length as DAC's *Shaping the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, covers similar terrain but reveals the gap between the DAC and UNDP (and perhaps the UN more widely) that nearly led to the world having two differing sets of global development goals (see later). A comparison of these two documents reveals (at least) four main differences.

1 The reasons for setting grand goals - The UNDP presents a moral argument, based on human rights, with a hint of benefits for wealthier countries. By contrast, the DAC presents a moral argument with a strong humanitarian/needs basis and balances this off with an argument for OECD self-interest.

2 The overarching goal - For the UNDP 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. In addition, while the UN explicitly specifies the need to reduce global inequality the DAC carefully avoids the mention of global income and asset inequalities.

3 The level at which the goals are pitched - The UN provides global assessments of past and future trends but emphasizes 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.

4 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. The *Human Development Report 1997* reverses this in its presentation (UNDP 1997:108-109) focussing on human development goals and placing growth at the end of its discussion.

Finally, there is the way in which the UNDP report refers to *Shaping the 21st Century*. The *HDR 1997* presents DAC's report as a small summary box (UNDP 1997:114) that is not referenced in the text. It is evident that both organisations seek the creation of some authoritative set of global goals for development. Both have decided that poverty reduction or eradication should be the focus and that a multi-dimensional listing is needed. Both recognise the UN summits and conferences of the early and mid-1990s as the source of specific goals that can claim legitimacy. But, neither is pushing to attempt to negotiate a common position.

While both the UNDP, UN Secretariat and DAC are pursuing an overarching goal of global poverty reduction their conceptual frameworks and immediate sub-goals are very different. The UN is still pursuing a grand human rights approach building on its original Declaration of 1948. The DAC's approach 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 at that time) 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 +5 and +10 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'. 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.

At the heart of these differences are the tensions between national sovereignty and internationalism (Kennedy 2006). The members of the UN and OECD are only prepared to go part of the way to sacrificing their sovereignty in collective agreements and action. With overlapping but different memberships and differing dynamics within those memberships, each organisation faces different constraints on promoting global policy. The twin track process, that would lead to the possibility of two different sets of global poverty reduction goals in March 2001, was well underway.

### ***3.6 SELLING THE IDGs IN THE RICH WORLD: CLARE SHORT AND THE UTTSTEIN 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, and had prompted the UN to think more about drawing together its own authoritative list. The political and public influence of the IDGs, and of UN Summit declarations, might have slowed down at this time but for three factors. None of these were programmed or planned – serendipity was to intervene again. The first were 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 of September 2000.

In May 1997 New Labour swept into power in the UK. 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, USA, Japan and EU) and would 'punch well above its weight' (my inverted commas). 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 (see my longer paper for a detailed account).

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. 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 iconic position within New Labour. 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 so she found herself in an unusual position, for an international development minister, of being treated as a budget priority. 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. It could not make increases in health or education or social security budgets without breaching this promise – but, it could dramatically increase the UK’s small aid budget without compromising its expenditure constraints. Short’s passionate advocacy for increased foreign aid – with the Cabinet and the public – made this an even more attractive policy option.

Short’s conversion of the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) into the Department for International Development (DFID) was facilitated by the quality of many of ODA’s existing staff, the recruitment of new technical advisers and the drafting into DFID of experienced development people who had links with New Labour. Since the late 1980s, ODA had been gradually transforming from an agency steeped in British bureaucratic culture, with a distinctly colonial feel, to an activist development agency. Chris Patten, the (junior) Conservative minister of the late 1980s, had pushed ODA staff in terms of both policy and management. Clare Short found herself with a Department that had real potential.

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 energetic minority of people<sup>xv</sup> were committed to foreign aid, fair trade, debt forgiveness and IFI reform. Alongside this a silent majority were sympathetic to some vague idea of humanitarian relief and international development.

Short came to her job with a list of things she needed to do quickly. Four of these had particular significance for the IDGs and would propel them forward. She needed to (i) rapidly produce a White Paper (ii) craft a policy narrative that would tell the public what international development was and would mobilise their support (iii) identify targets for DFID so that the Department could perform effectively in New Labour’s

‘results based management’ systems, and (iv) find a way of shifting the government’s development focus from UK foreign aid projects to changing the policies (development, trade, military, environmental) of the big players<sup>xvi</sup>.

And then came what appears to have been a Damascene moment for her when she found the IDGs (which she and DFID term the International Development targets or IDTs):

‘...*Shaping the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*...drew together the recommendations of the great UN conferences of the 1990’s ... 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 2004:53-4).

Advisors at DFID report Short’s immediate enthusiasm for the IDGs: they were exactly what she wanted<sup>xvii</sup>. She used the IDGs in four main ways. They provided the basis for her first White Paper, *Eliminating World Poverty: A Challenge for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. She sold the IDGs to her cabinet colleagues, New Labour and the UK public and ensured they were fed into the media. They were re-engineered into the first set of targets for DFID’s public service agreement with the Treasury. Finally Clare Short hawked them around the world: ‘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>xviii</sup>’ (Short 2004:88-9). She also ‘sold’ them to African and Asian heads of state and ministers and, according to her advisors<sup>xix</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 Spring 1998 she met Evelyn Herfkens (the Netherlands), Hilde Johnson (Norway) and Heidi-Marie Wiezoreck-Zeul (Germany) who were all ministers for international development for their respective countries (ibid). As the informal Uttstein Group they operated very effectively at G7/8, OECD and UN meetings and summits. The policy narrative of the IDGs as the means to rapidly reduce world poverty was greatly amplified by this passionate group.

### **3.7 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 debated establishing a *Groupe de reflexion*. 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. A series of meetings with member states and NGOs were held to select topics that should be the focus of the Millennium Assembly and of a Millennium Declaration<sup>xx</sup>.

In mid-May 1999 Annan laid out his initial plans. The overarching theme of the meeting was identified as ‘the United Nations in the twenty-first century’ and four sub-topics were specified to structure debates and resolutions:

- (a) Peace and security, including disarmament;
- (b) Development, including poverty eradication;
- (c) Human rights;
- (d) Strengthening the United Nations (ibid).

The shift that had been occurring in development over the 1990s was now being institutionalised. Development was no longer about national development (nation-building, economic growth and a general improvement in welfare) it was synonymous with poverty eradication and/or reduction.

Countries, international agencies, NGOs and activists began to try and 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 – equally, they sought to torpedo declarations of which they disapproved. All of these actors knew that getting into the Declaration would create an unprecedented opportunity – if ‘your goal’ was in the Declaration then you could insist it was on the agenda at national and international meetings for years to come.

For development NGOs and activists the main foci were debt, trade, aid and social development. Debt relief had made substantial progress as Jubilee 2000, and others, had persuaded the G8 that debt write-offs were desirable, feasible and widely supported by the public in many rich countries. The Fair Trade Movement had mobilised public support for trade reform. But it was fractured by the split between reformists and more radical anti-capitalists and some of the opposition against trade reform – farmer groups, agribusiness and trade unions in the West – were exceptionally politically powerful. The broader-based development NGOs included debt relief and fair trade in their demands and added increased foreign aid and a focus on social policies (education, health and social protection). Websites buzzed, email campaigns piled up in minister’s accounts and large and small meetings were convened, especially in the rich world.

As the Millennium Assembly drew closer the member states of the UN, and the heads of state or government who would have to approve the UN Declaration, took a closer interest in what they might be expected to agree. Political leaders, politicians, political parties, along with those who could ‘bend the ear’ of these elites, engaged in the lobbying process. Negotiating the precise wording of documents, often behind closed doors, is a key diplomatic activity at the UN. The candles were soon to start burning late into the night as temporary alliances evolved and mutual antagonisms matured over exactly what was and was not acceptable in a global statement about the goals of poverty eradication.



For the UN and Kofi Annan the Millennium Assembly had to be successful. 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 USA and the permanent members of the Security Council) would support real efforts to reform and finance the UN. The Assembly needed to glow with global solidarity and no attention diverting disagreements or fall-outs should distract the media. None of the main players (rich and large countries), and ideally none of the minor players (poorer and smaller countries), must be seen to break ranks with a Millennium Declaration consensus.

One obvious way of proceeding would have been to produce a Millennium listing of all the development goals agreed at UN Summits during the 1990s. This could be done quite straight-forwardly but it had two great disadvantages. First, such a list would be very long and could well be dismissed as a mere ‘shopping list’ identifying lots of desirable goals but setting no priorities and thus largely irrelevant to negotiating budgets (increases and allocations) or changes in national policies and plans. The second problem was that key constituencies in the UN membership – the G1 (ie USA), the G8 and the G77 – had not signed up to some of the goals and/or had withdrawn the support they had originally offered.

So, waves of formal/official and informal/unofficial meetings were conducted from mid-1999 to Spring 2000 to develop the content of the Millennium Declaration. The results of these consultations were pulled together in a pre-Summit document, under the authorship of the Secretary-General and drafted by his advisor John Ruggie. **[CHECK CROSSETTE PAPER]** This would be the basis for a final round of negotiations to determine what went into the final Declaration.

On April 3 2000 Kofi Annan launched *We the Peoples: the Role of the United Nations in the 21<sup>st</sup> 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...’. Not surprisingly, being a UN publication, this document was very different from the DAC’s *Shaping the 21<sup>st</sup> 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. It was also less coherent than the DAC document with a summary that was quite different from its conclusion. Most important, for those concerned with global poverty reduction, it had a quite different set of poverty reduction goals than the IDGs. A comparison of the goals prioritised in *We the Peoples* and those in *Shaping the 21<sup>st</sup> 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’ (ie they appeared on Annan’s listing but not in the DAC or UNDP listings<sup>xxi</sup>). There are three big losers – gender equality and women’s empowerment, reproductive health and , more generally the goals for the health sector. Arguably, the ‘winners’ were economic growth, technology, the setting of goals for the rich countries, the environment and the highlighting of Africa’s problems.

### 3.7.1 The ‘Losers’

**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 two) 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/mention 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 – appear to have frightened Kofi Annan and/or his advisors from including gender equality or women’s empowerment as explicit goals<sup>xxii</sup>.

**Reproductive health<sup>xxiii</sup>:** The non-appearance of reproductive health in *We the Peoples* provides detailed insights into the often hidden processes of global public policy-making (see Crossette 2004 and my longer paper for full details). Despite this goal being agreed at the UN convened International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) at Cairo in 1994, being reaffirmed at the Beijing Women’s Summit in 1995 and at the UNGASS in September 1999 and being included in DAC’s IDGs it failed to make the April 2000 document. Perhaps even more surprisingly (amazingly?), the goal of reducing maternal mortality was not in *We the Peoples*.

After the ICPD+5 meeting activists may have become complacent and thought that the paradigm shift to reproductive health had been institutionalised. Also ‘The Millennium Summit process did not loom large enough on people’s radar screens’ (Bernstein in Crossette 2004:9). This was not the case for those opposed to the Cairo Agenda. The Millennium Summit was at the centre of their radar screens and they were working actively behind the scenes to ensure that reproductive health was not mentioned in the Millennium Declaration.

What has been labelled ‘an unholy’ alliance (Berer 2001) was mobilising. According to Sen (2005:49) this was spearheaded by the Vatican and included the UN delegations of conservative Islamic countries and conservative, evangelical Christians groups from the USA. The latter were increasing in size and becoming increasingly powerful in political terms. The influence of the Vatican 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>xxiv</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 were thus able to ensure that the G77 opposed reproductive health goals<sup>xxv</sup>. This message was forcefully relayed to the UN Secretariat and the Secretary-General.

Several other factors contributed to this blocking out of reproductive health goals. The political context in the US had changed – Al Gore led the US team to the ICPD in 1994 but now, campaigning for President, he was keen to avoid any publicity about

him being pro-abortion. It is reported that Sudan's representative on this issue – a woman – was very effective at making a powerful and persistent case about this goal confronting Muslim culture and tradition and encouraging sex outside of marriage. Around this time there were changes in the UNFPA senior management team and this meant one of their lead representatives came from a conventional family planning background and was not passionate about reproductive health in the way UNFPA predecessors had been. Finally, it has to be recognised that the key people negotiating about reproductive health and the Millennium Declaration at the UN were not people with population and development backgrounds but generalist diplomats. Their priorities focussed on geo-political and strategic considerations, in which issues can be traded, rather than on agreement on an optimal population and development policy in the pursuit of global poverty reduction.

To the chagrin of Northern European countries and the World Bank<sup>xxvi</sup> the resolutions of Cairo(1994), Beijing(1995) and New York (1999) were missing from *We the Peoples* and there were only odd references to relevant issues<sup>xxvii</sup>. This might have appeared to have been the death knell for the reproductive health goal in terms of the UN's Millennium Declaration. But, unobserved by most development experts, the target setting of the 1990s had left the world with a two-track process. Only eight weeks after publishing *We, The Peoples* Kofi Annan signed and launched *2000 A Better World for All: Progress Towards the International Development Goals*, a joint UN, OECD, IMF and World Bank document. This promised that the UN would whole heartedly support the IDGs – the sixth of which was an unequivocal goal to provide reproductive health for all by 2015. The Secretary-General was backing both tracks of the twin track process of goal setting that was underway. Later, when the IDGs and Millennium Declaration achieved 'concordance' in 2001 reproductive health would vanish again.

**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>xxviii</sup>. Quite what happened – why the agreements of the 1990s and the interests of the WHO, WFP, UNICEF and others had so little influence – is unclear. *We the Peoples* executive summary identifies two health goals – redirecting health research budgets to the problems that affect 90% of people and reducing the rate of HIV infection for young people by 25%.<sup>xxix</sup> The agreements to reduce child and infant mortality (Children's Summit, ICPD and Women's Summit) and maternal mortality (ICPD and Women's Summit) 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 UNDP's *Human Development Report 1997* could not be more marked. The UN Secretariat and the UNDP seem to be operating in different worlds.

### 3.7.2 The 'Winners'

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, the idea that there should be goals for rich countries (what turned into Goal 8 of the MDGs), technology (especially IT), 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. The text seeks to make it clear, to those who believe the UN is too focused on rights and equality, that wealth creation will not be neglected.

**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 stood in stark contrast to the DAC’s IDGs which were focused on what was to happen in poorer countries. Accompanying DAC text discusses the need for trade reform, debt relief and aid, but the DAC/OECD did not convert these into goals or targets. 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 G 77, and particularly members like India that were not aid dependent and who were not going to be lectured at by rich nations, argued that the Millennium Declaration and any associated goals must be more balanced. Many in the UN secretariat agreed with this sentiment. As a result, 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.

**Technology:** Technology gets a relatively high profile in *We the Peoples* certainly when compared to *Shaping the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* or the *Human Development Report 1997* on poverty. The sixth of the priorities identified in the executive summary is ‘building digital bridges...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 is allocated) 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). At present I can only surmise about why IT was such a winner in Annan’s document. 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. It must also be noted that whenever people stare into the crystal ball to talk about the long term future then 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.

***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:*** While health issues generally lost out in the political and bureaucratic scrambles to enter the recommendations in Annan’s document 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, in the concluding chapter it is one of the eight recommendations aimed at directly reducing poverty, it 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 the *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 discussions 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’ (ibid:78). This is no surprise, given that the continent was now concluding its second ‘lost decade’ and that any attempt to monitor progress towards achieving poverty reduction goals almost inevitably found that Africa’s progress was slower than other parts of the world or in reverse. 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.

### **3.8 GLOBAL POVERTY REDUCTION GOALS: A TWO TRACK PROCESS**

The launch of *We the Peoples* provided a strong indication of the agreement that Kofi Annan and the UN Secretariat thought could be achieved at the Millennium Summit by unanimous consensus. Inevitably it attracted a variety of responses some of which

could be parried by the documents 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 covered could usually be referred to some part of the text where it was mentioned.

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. These organisations appreciated the constraints operating on Annan and UNGA agreements more generally – but, many if not most of their staff felt that the IDG listing, imperfect though it was, had distinct advantages over the list gradually emerging from the build up to the 2000 Summit.

While Clare Short and the Utstein Group had been promoting the IDGs globally the DAC had been trying to sharpen the goals. In what was presented as a technical exercise, the DAC had started to identify detailed 'indicators'<sup>xxx</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 technical discussions provided political opportunities for interest groups whose goal had not made the original list to try to get their goal on the list as an indicator of some other goal. The game was still far from over.

In an unprecedented show of solidarity (Emmerij 2001:119) 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*. 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).

This document re-iterated the DAC's 1996 IDGs almost exactly. It re-affirmed the thinking behind DAC goal setting efforts: '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 in 1996, partnership – or for this four member 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 (for a full discussion see my longer paper). 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 (Annan et al 2000:5). This might be argued to be an editorial device – separating out these goals as maternal mortality is a different goal requiring different policies than reduced infant/child mortality. But, it did also mean that the IDGs had a strong orientation towards reproductive health – two of its seven goals

were now directly aimed at this issue. This stood in stark contrast to the avoidance of this issue in *We the Peoples*. In addition, a range of indicators had been identified<sup>xxxii</sup>.

Beyond its content the launch of *2000 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’. 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 a mix.

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 parallel tracks – with both involved in each track! 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 on to implementation, then questions about the difficulty of coordinating two differing sets of goals would come thick and fast. Any steps the UN could make towards the IDGs, or visa-versa, would make an eventual compromise or reconciliation easier. But that was tomorrow’s problem – for now the spotlight was on the UN as it negotiated the conversion of *We the Peoples* into the Millennium Declaration.

### **3.9 FROM WE THE PEOPLES TO THE MILLENNIUM DECLARATION AND MILLENNIUM ASSEMBLY**

Over Summer 2000 there were frantic negotiations about what should finally go into the Millennium Declaration. Our focus here is on the ‘development and poverty eradication’ section and not the entire document. In this section there was a particular focus on what would go into the specific goals that would be spelt out (this turned out to be paragraph 19) as it was these that would attract publicity, policy changes and resources.

The position of the OECD, and virtually all of its members<sup>xxxii</sup>, and of the IFIs 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, formal meetings with UN civil servants, marches in national capitals, cups of tea with Kofi Annan) to advance their issue or to challenge issues over which they disagreed.

For example, the International Women’s Health Coalition (IWHC) was lobbying UN ambassadors and member governments to include reproductive rights in the Declaration, gaining media attention for its arguments and mobilising gender activists around the world. By contrast, the Vatican was working closely and covertly with the

‘unholy’ alliance it led, and increasingly linking to conservative Christian, evangelical groups in the US, to ensure that G77 and G1 did not promote reproductive health or women’s rights as part of their agenda. The details of the myriad of overt and covert final negotiations are not public knowledge, but by contrasting the concrete goals identified in *We the Peoples* and the Millennium Declaration (Table ?) a partial understanding of the processes shaping the final agreement can be glimpsed.

To reach compromises on these last minute debates the UN civil servants involved appear to have developed a subtle device. They divided the resolutions in to two paragraphs<sup>xxxiii</sup>. 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 (ie they make the list in full). Paragraph 20 – ‘We also resolve’ – lists agreements that will not go forward as concrete items for implementation but remain on the international agenda. 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 a goal will make the final listing but will not be a priority in the implementation phase. In effect, your goal stays on the agenda but you will have to argue the case that it is a priority, yet again, in the future. This is a game that probably only UN diplomats and key participants fully understand – but it seems to have been an important part of the final set of deals that were struck.

***Extreme Poverty Goal:*** 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 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. It is hard to identify any UN member state or influential lobby that would oppose this addition.

***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 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. So, the explicit goal is mentioned but in a paragraph that is not to contribute directly to the implementation programme.

***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 ICPD, 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 focussing on HIV/AIDS (because of the concern that it is still neglected in many national level health strategies) creates the danger of distorting health budgets, aid flows and plans in ways that will impact negatively on overall health status.

**AIDS orphans:** The broadening of the health goal to cover major diseases appears to have been compensated for by the addition of this goal [**check which summit it came from**]. 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. Hearsay 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, and this may have helped this ‘new’ goal enter the list at the last minute.

**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, in terms of lobbies against it and/or a lack of effective support by its proponents are unclear<sup>xxxiv</sup>. The omission of a ‘decent work for all’ goal in the MDGs is partly explained by ineffective strategy in the 1990s by the ILO leadership and transnational labour organisations (see Hulme forthcoming).

**Benefits of new technology:** This goal 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 HIPC transfers to being a requirement for all developing countries wishing to access IFI finance. The dropping of this goal also had the political advantage of not demanding that rich countries come up with national poverty reduction plans<sup>xxxv</sup>.

**The special needs of small island states and landlocked developing countries:** Paragraphs 17 and 18 re-iterate the agreements of specialist UN summits that ‘the international community’ support these two groups of country in overcoming the specific problems they face. This keeps them on the agenda, but does not mean that the plan of implantation will prioritise them.

**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 are included in the Millennium Declaration (paragraphs 15, 16 and 20), but they are not yet part of the list in paragraph 19 that is intended to drive the Secretary-General's plan of action and, none of these goals are specific in terms of specifying deadlines for their 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. It was agreed that negotiation would be put off until 2001 when a 'High-level International and Intergovernmental Event on Financing for Development' is to be held (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 a final, 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 official stage of the process was for the Secretary-General to draw up a 'road map' as to how the world would achieve its goals. For those on the treadmill of promoting global poverty reduction there was no time to take a breather. It was now time to:

- Finalise the details of the list of goals and specify targets or/and indicators
- Preparing for the Finance for Development Summit
- Organise a mechanism for a global plan and for national plans
- Develop 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.

### ***3.10 CONCORDANCE: FROM MILLENNIUM DECLARATION TO MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS***

The heads of state and 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 other issues. That was not the case for the multilateral agencies tasked with drawing up a plan for the implementation of the Declaration's goals for development and poverty eradication. 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 they had to be more specific about what exactly their goals and targets were. Although many people refer to the MDGs as a product of the Millennium Summit this is not the case. The Millennium Declaration provides a set of resolutions but these are not the coherent listing of goals of the MDGs.

The UK continued with its self-appointed role of taking leadership in moving the global poverty reduction process forward. In February 2001 [CHECK] Gordon Brown

and Clare Short convened a meeting in London to advance the ‘child poverty’ reduction targets (infant and child mortality reduction and UPE). They did well, as it was attended by the leading players – Jim Wolfensohn from the World Bank, Horst Koller from the IMF, Carol Bellamy head of UNICEF and Mark Malloch Brown Administrator of UNDP alongside representatives from developing countries, donors and NGOs. The meeting sought to define the responsibilities and accountabilities of these various actors. This was a positive event building on the ‘new consensus’ (Malloch Brown 2001) created by the Millennium Declaration and gaining media attention. Observant participants at this meeting could spot a significant inconsistency, however. While Brown and Short (and bilateral donors) assumed that the IDGs, now with their detailed indicators on the PARIS21 website, were accepted as global goals the UN agencies were working with the more ambiguous lists of the Millennium Declaration. For this meeting this was not much of a problem – as most delegates also went back to the more detailed goals set at the Child Summit in 1990. However, for other topics the difference between the IDGs and the Declaration might be more of a problem.

The UN’s technical specialists and statisticians were already liaising with co-professionals at the DAC in Paris about indicators and sources of data for the goals of the Millennium Summit. DAC statisticians were ahead of them in this task<sup>xxxvi</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 DAC IDGs (and had UN, World Bank and IMF agreement on) there were two possible ways that the twin track process might move along.

1. **Continue with a twin track process.** This would mean that both organisations had 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. This would look like and would be a mess.
2. **Merge the two sets of goals.** This was the logical thing to do but was problematic. At the UN – how could Annan explain to the General Assembly that he’d unilaterally decided to modify the agreement that 189 countries had reached. On the other side, why should the OECD change the IDGs – in June 2000 the UN, World Bank and IMF had endorsed them – was the UN trying to renege on this agreement?

This issue came to a head at a World Bank convened meeting at Washington DC, 19-21 March 2001. It was entitled ‘From Consensus to Action: a Seminar on the International Development Goals’, ignoring the fact that a consensus had not been reached. The meeting was attended by more than 200 delegates from the multilaterals (World Bank, IMF, OECD, UNDP and UN agencies), bilateral donors and delegates from more than a dozen developing countries. It was designed as a high level technical meeting which, by wisdom or good luck, was very 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 office 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 of the Bank and

UNDP, not the Bank President or UN Secretary General who would have needed to think carefully about their personal political positioning.

Mark Malloch Brown's opening address sparked off negotiations about the IDGs and what he carefully termed the 'Millennium Declaration Goals' (and subsequently he talked of the Millennium Declaration Targets). His talk was a subtle pitch to the Bank and IMF - the UN would accept IFI oversight of national poverty reduction strategies for developing countries (PRSPs) if the IFIs would support the Millennium Declaration Goals - 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, originally a USAID official involved in the DAC meetings that led to the IDGs but now an academic, 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 MDTs, 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 at this stage: '...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 Millennium Declaration Targets.

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 suspicious or hostile to the idea of global poverty reduction to point out that the even the leading agencies could not agree on what exactly they were trying to achieve. DAC representatives spoke up to defend the IDGs, but by then Bradford had left the room to photocopy a hand written note he'd 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>
<b>1 Poverty Reduction</b>	<b>1 Poverty Reduction</b> <b>2 Water</b> <b>5 Slums</b> <b>6 Digital [divide]</b>
<b>2 Universal Primary Education</b>	<b>2 Education: Universal Primary education</b>
<b>3 Gender equality</b>	<b>3 Education: Gender Gap</b>
<b>4 Infant and Child Mortality</b> <b>5 Maternal Mortality</b> <b>6 Reproductive Health</b>	<b>4 Health: HIV/AIDS</b> <b>2 Water</b>

Source: Colin Bradford, photocopy of hand-written 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): '...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 annex 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 effected 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, and indeed to some might seem purely a matter of

semantics, 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 what ‘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.

Yet again, the biggest loser was reproductive health. It might be 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 earlier). Sudan, Libya and Iran were still not prepared to let reproductive health join the list and, with the change of President in the US, they now had support from the Bush administration as well as the Holy See (Sen 2005). 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 (interview) calls a ‘fuzzy compromise’ the HIV/AIDS goal included ‘contraceptive prevalence rate’ as an indicator - another 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 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>xxxvii</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 supposedly 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 7 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 very specific targets or agree dates for achievement. They wanted to keep their options open<sup>xxxviii</sup>.

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 discussions between the OECD and UN achieved a strengthening with regard to gender issues, especially when reproductive health is considered, compared to the Millennium Declaration Goals.

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>xxxix</sup> and for an extended period Indian UN representatives also made the point that they had signed up to the Declaration.

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 stated proudly that all of their decisions would be based purely on the US national interest (and their interpretation of this had a narrow and short term focus) 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 they viewed foreign aid as a 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 USA, 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 their panic and haste to respond against this appalling event the Bush administration thought a little more than it had previously about 'soft power' approaches to foreign policy and there was a little (very little but vastly more than pre-9/11) 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.

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 that his 'friend', President Fox, was inviting him to. 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. As discussed in Hulme (forthcoming) other factors (Bono, Christian conservatives, the tension between Condoleezza Rice and the US Treasury Secretary) also encouraged Bush to go to Monterrey – and once there he could not be the only leader not to show his generosity. 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 FFD was a success. The MDGs were informally approved there (even if not formally ratified) and Bush promised to significantly increase US foreign aid (through the Millennium Challenge Account and PEPFAR). The MDGs were now fully ready for action.

## 4 UNDERSTANDING THE MAKING OF THE MDGS

### 4.1 *The Processes*

*The evolutionary nature of the MDGs* The processes involved in making the MDGs conform with the concepts of global public policy and, indeed, much of what is known about public policy-making at regional and national levels. 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, attempts to specify basic needs and books and reports proposing global poverty reduction. 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 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. Even that 'final' agreement has been amended as recently as 2006 with the addition of a 'decent work' indicator to goal 1 (**reference**). One must also suspect, and perhaps hope, that the present MDGs are only the first of an evolving series of lists for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century each of which will become more coherent and gain greater support from UN member states and global civil society.

One also needs to note the 'ins and outs' that have been iterated during the MDG process. Gender equality and reproductive health have been heavily contested appearing in some drafts and removed or watered down in the next version. 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 2004 the goals were already being targeted in many countries



through plans of action. Even goals that failed to make the list live on – reproductive health may not have made it to the final list but the WHO’s policies and plans make it quite clear that this goal is being actively pursued in many if not most developing countries.

***Multiple channels and unclear authorities*** 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; MNCs 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 one to another. 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 Uttstein 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, Emmerij et al’s ‘two UNs’ [**CHECK REF**]. 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. In 2001 the baton 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 first list formally entitled ‘the Millennium Development Goals’. Now, at the ‘implementation’ stage a vast network of individuals, organisations, governments and multilateral agencies are engaged. 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. In contrast, General Assembly involvement has favoured a focus on the goals for rich countries while DAC leadership has not prioritised Goal 8. Organisational cultures are also important – when the UN Secretariat is leading then documents tend to take on a broader human rights flavour. When DAC or the World Bank has been engaged then the documents focus much more on precise specifications and measurement.

***Political negotiating and bargaining*** Third, throughout the entire process political negotiation and bargaining - sometimes directly and sometimes through

intermediaries – have been at the heart of the process. The most obvious tensions have been between the positions of (i) the rich countries (articulated by the DAC) and those of the poor countries (articulated through G77 and revealed by the UN's struggles to achieve consensus), and (ii) conservative religious countries and groups and liberal countries and groups.

Sometimes these negotiations 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 main multilaterals 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<sup>x1</sup>. 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. At crucial times, as in the concordance discussions between OECD and the UN in 2001, these negotiations are presented as being ‘technical’ but senior international civil servants have to ensure that they accommodate political pressures within their technical agreements.

**Power and influence** 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. As discussed later 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 goals) but never took the lead that it could have done on other issues. In the early days of the Bush administration there was a possibility that the US would shift from ambivalence to opposition, however 9/11 cemented the US into continued ambivalence.

The US position – enormous power but rarely applied – contrasted with the UK position. The personal commitment of an energetic development minister (Short) and finance minister (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, an 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 like-minded G77 states. The G77's *modus operandi*, requiring a consensus, meant that a tiny minority of UN 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 official debates around the UN conferences of the 1990s, the IDGs, the Millennium Declaration or the MDGs attempt to challenge the premise that capitalism is the economic base for human progress and welfare. Trade reform and debt relief were discussed but in terms of changes and improvements but not in terms of any fundamental changes to the overarching system. Such matters

(trade and debt) 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.

***The policy narrative*** Fifth, as has been widely argued for other sectors (Roe, Scoones and Keeley), 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/improve the social status of women/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 Uttstein Group) – basically, ‘if we all pursue these goals then we can reduce poverty by half by 2015’. This was a simple message – 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’ campaign that [**DETAILS AND NUMBERS**]. 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 very upper end of best case scenarios, that the gap between the narrative and the achievements is exposed at an early stage.

***Serendipity*** 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 serendipity can sometimes bring opportunities and individuals (or small groups of people) at the right time and the right place can shape the direction that events take. At a micro-scale we see this with Colin Bradford’s ‘appearances’ – waving down Jan Pronk in a car park to advance the idea of setting up a DAC *Groupe de reflexion* 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 unplanned and unprogrammed 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 took the International Development portfolio as a booby prize, but 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 persuasive, female representative to talk against reproductive health and women’s empowerment helped to strengthen the case against these issues.

## 5.2 Actors and Roles

The evolution of the MDGs involved so many actors that only a small number of key actors can be reviewed here. At the outset it must be noted that while many actors (organisations, UN member states, multilateral agencies) may have an official viewpoint on any specific issue different individuals, parts of the organisation or groups within a country may have quite a different position and, overtly or covertly, may collaborate with the 'opposition'. Epistemic communities (Haas), advocacy coalitions (Sabatier) and knowledge networks cut across the boundaries of organisations, nation-states and other formal entities.

For the evolution of the MDGs the most significant players have been multilateral organisations – especially the UN and the OECD's DAC. Both 'UNs' (Emmerij et al 2001) have been involved in the processes. The UN's international civil servants, in the Secretariat and its specialised development agencies, played leading roles as convenors and organisers of the big conferences of the 1990s that created the ingredients for the MDGs. The member states of the UN shaped what went into conference and summit declarations and gave the goals legitimacy by agreeing to them. In late 1999 and early 2000 the Secretariat took the lead in the evolutionary process with the drafting of *We the Peoples* and the General Assembly undertook the transition to the Millennium Declaration. At the 'concordance' stage, between the Millennium Declaration and the IDGs, the UN's leading civil servants returned. Theoretically they were operating 'technically' but their activities also demanded substantial political consultation with UN members to ensure that the legitimacy of the September 2001 Millennium Development Goals was not challenged.

The other big player was the DAC. It became a leader of the MDG evolution process more by accident than by any conscious, strategic attempt to take the lead in the global poverty reduction agenda. When its civil servants drew up a list of goals from recent UN conferences this appeared a routine task that had no especial significance. The goals were carefully filtered through the DAC's OECD member states and the content of the IDGs was carefully crafted so as not to offend any of its rich country members (the Japanese government had gender equality watered down) or the group's overarching interests (goals for aid, trade reform and debt relief were discussed in the text but not listed). Once this was done the DAC secretariat developed its technical capacity to define and measure goal achievement. The DAC's efforts were rewarded in June 2000 by unprecedented support from the UN, World Bank and IMF with the co-publication by these agencies of *2000 A Better World for All*. In March 2001, the DAC appeared to be about to be pushed aside when Mark Malloch Brown proposed a division of key roles between the agencies that can claim global legitimacy, the UN and the IFIs. The IFIs could oversee national level poverty reduction planning (PRSPs) and the UN would finalise the MDGs and take on the roles of global monitoring, implementation and mobilising public support. However, the DAC gained a seat at the table for the final negotiations and the 'final' MDG listing moved closer to the original DAC listing.

The World Bank's role through to 2000 has been largely supportive. It signalled approval of the IDGs by using them for the framework of its first *Global Monitoring Report* in 1997 and in signing up to *2000 A Better World for All*. However, its main priority for new mechanisms at this time was at the national level with the evolving Comprehensive Development Framework or CDF, the brain child of its President Jim

Wolfensohn, and the parallel development of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Many at the Bank were appalled at the ‘now you see it now you don’t’ treatment of gender equality and reproductive health in the MDG evolutionary process, believing that these goals were essential in their own right and that they had a fundamental, instrumental role in the processes of income poverty reduction.

The Bank’s 19<sup>th</sup> Street ‘sister’, the IMF engaged very little with the evolution of the MDGs. At that time it did not feel as vulnerable as the World Bank to US politicians asking ‘what does it do?’. Its only real concern was to ensure that such target-setting exercises did not impact on its ability to specify what was sound macroeconomic policy for developing countries. IMF staff report vague concerns about so many of the goals being ‘social policy’ goals that might put pressure on sound fiscal management and some saw it as a ‘European approach’ that contrasted with the Fund’s Anglo-Saxon economics. But, reading between the lines, most IMF staff knew – as part of the belief system of their epistemic community – that the UN and donors and politicians and NGOs love talking shops and big conferences but, when push comes to shove and economic meltdown beckons, most countries do what the IMF tells them and put UN documents back on the shelves.

Other multilateral organisations and associations have played different roles. The G7/G8 took a regular interest in debt reduction, trade and Africa’s particular problems and this fed into MDG evolution. It sanctioned the inclusion of debt reduction and trade reform commitments in the MDGs – as long as these were kept non-specific. The EU seems to have been marginal and was upstaged by the informal Uttstein Group that gave a strong European presence to the MDG process in the late 1990s.

Individual countries have taken very different roles in the evolution of the MDGs. For example the ‘special relationship’ between the US and UK has been marked by its non-existence. The US has been relatively ambivalent – it has not attempted to stop or slow down their evolution (which it probably had the power to do in 1995 and 1996) and equally it has not chosen to take on a leadership role. In part this is because global poverty reduction and the operations of the DAC are only a minor footnote on its foreign policy – ‘off the radar’ most of the time in the realpolitik of US politics. The shock of 9/11 pushed the possibility of ‘soft power’ (Nye 2003) strategies for achieving US foreign policy goals, and particularly national security, back on the agenda and so, in 2002 George Bush engaged with the MDG process (and was impacted on by the MDGs) at Monterrey (see chapter on ‘Financing the MDGs’). But, still there was a deep ambivalence – despite well constructed pleas (Brainard et al 2003, Brookings etc) Bush’s Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) did not use the MDGs as part of its framework and, despite its title, did not even mention them or the Millennium Declaration [**CHECK**]. The other US interest in the MDGs came from its conservative Christian groups who wanted to ensure that abortion and advice about contraception for unmarried women was not supported by the MDGs. They did not have to role up their sleeves and engage too energetically however as the Vatican, Sudan and others fought off the reproductive and sexual health goals.

The contrast with the UK could not be more marked. It punched well beyond its economic and political weight. This was partly because of deep structural factors – its desire to play a global leadership role to countervail its weakening status within the global political economy and its colonial legacy and links to poor countries. It was also because of factors specific to the time and context (discussed in section 3.6). New

Labour needed a high profile in international development and with Short and Brown personally committed to the IDGs, and later the MDGs, the UK through its ministers and DFID took on the role of selling the IDGs and MDGs to the world. This ensured that other donors and major NGOs engaged more fully with the idea of global target-setting and drew in public support for this cause in the UK and beyond.

Perhaps, most significantly in a consideration of the roles that different countries and groups of countries have played are the absences. In particular, to a high degree developing countries have been followers not leaders of the process of MDG evolution. While some of the major goal setting conferences were in developing countries (Beijing, Cairo, Rio) the bulk of the discussions, negotiations and compromises that led to the MDGs occurred in New York and Paris and the cities of OECD countries. As members of the UN individual developing countries voted on conference and summit agreements and formally sanctioned the Millennium Declaration.

The most active engagement by developing countries that is documented is the role that conservative Islamic countries (Sudan, Libya and Iran) played in blocking the progress of the reproductive health goals, attempting to block the maternal mortality reduction goal and seeking to water down the goals for gender equality and women's empowerment. The lack of fuller engagement of G77 (as a group and as individual members) with the evolution of the MDGs remains a cause for concern and needs to be researched. It may be that the role of DAC meant that the later stages of the process, as the IDGs were converted into and merged with the MDGs, was still seen as something that was owned by donors and multilaterals. It may be that developing countries engaged more fully and this is not documented. Still, there are alarming parallels with the PRSP and PRS processes of evolution (see PRSP chapter) with the main players in global poverty reduction – the developing countries – appearing to have a minor role in the design of the mechanisms that are to make global poverty reduction achievable.

This lack of engagement is also reflected in the world's big, emerging economies – the BRICs of Brazil, Russia, India and China. Nowhere in the vast literature on the evolution of the MDGS is there reference to any of these countries taking on any role in shaping the outcomes of discussions, other than at the Earth Summit in Rio and the Women's Summit in Beijing. Their hosting of these events appears to be based more on it being 'their turn' to show their global significance by having a major event on their territory than a commitment to shaping the global agenda. **[CHECK THIS OUT]** Interviews with academics and senior civil servants concerned with poverty analysis and social welfare in Brazil, India and China reveal a minimal level of knowledge about the MDGs. There is a vague understanding that countries have to report about their MDG progress and that poverty reduction in India and China is helping to achieve global targets, but the MDGs seem to be largely irrelevant to and/or ignored by the BRICs' expanding official development assistance programmes<sup>xli</sup>. By choice or by default, the BRICs would appear to be closer to a US than a North European position on the global targeting of poverty reduction. The MDGs might just make a footnote in their foreign policy but their national politicians and senior administrators would probably not even know what the acronym referred to.

This contrasts with the role of the Holy See, with only UN observer status, which played an energetic part at the UN summits from Rio onwards and was a major player, behind the scenes, at the ICPD and in the processes leading up to the Millennium Declaration. The Vatican worked on two main fronts in the MDG process. The first was general encouragement for the UN and member states to be compassionate to the poor as, central to much Catholic theology, was the belief that all people should seek to reduce human suffering and support the poor. Depending on one's interpretation this can be seen as an essential component of the Catholic Church's doctrine that is actively pursued or more cynically as an attempt to claim the high moral ground (Sen 2005). The second front is much more controversial. According to Berger (2001), Crossette (2004), Sen (2005), Standing (2004) and other sources (pers comm. de Jong) the Holy See played a leading role in seeking to ensure that reproductive health and women's empowerment were excluded from or watered down in all UN conference agreements, *We the People*, the Millennium Declaration and the 'final' MDGs. At times this strategy was highly effective, as when *We the Peoples* excluded not only reproductive health but also reducing maternal mortality (and the related goals of reduced infant and child mortality). While the Vatican was only part of the lobby achieving this exclusion I must confess to finding it both extraordinary (how could child survival not be a Millennium goal?) and repugnant.

Assessing the many different roles played by the tens of thousands of NGOs, civil society organisations, think tanks and interest groups that engaged with the process leading to the MDGs, and the thousands of networks and coalitions into which they coalesced, is a daunting task. The numbers of NGOs officially attending conferences and summits reached staggering numbers (2315 representatives from 811 NGOs attended the Copenhagen Summit and a further 4500 representatives attended the associated NGO forum; at Beijing more than 5000 delegates from 2100 NGOs attended the Summit and nearly 30000 attended the associated NGO forum activities – see Emmerij et al 2001:82-87 for full details of attendances at summits). Even a casual internet search on any UN summit will rapidly locate hundreds of documents produced by NGOs to lobby for their cause. On some issues pressure from NGOs appears to have been uni-directional and offer support for relatively well-established, non-controversial goals – such as universal primary education, halting the spread of HIV/AIDS – attendance at conferences was concerned not so much with promoting the goal as promoting particular tactics for achieving the goal. On other issues the NGOs were engaged in extremely heated debates on which there were clear sides – most obviously at the ICPD were women's health and gender NGOs argued powerfully for a resolution on reproductive and sexual health and identified this as a human right while religious groups argued against the evil of terminating human life and the immorality that such approaches fostered. In some cases a specific NGO 'side' can be very influential in the form that the final agreement takes. For example, to some people's surprise, the power of the pro-reproductive health NGO lobby at Cairo contributed to a final agreement that some thought would take many more years to achieve.

**[NEED A FEW PARAGRAPHS HERE ON THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN REPORTING CONFERENCES AND SUMMITS AND IDGS AND MDGS AND DIFFERENCES SIMILARTITIES IN US, EUROPE, DEVELOPING COUNTRIES – ANY IDEAS ON SOURCES?]**

Last but not least is the role of the public in the processes behind the evolution of the MDGs. This is a crucially important but relatively neglected issue in the available literature. At this stage I can provide only a general commentary and refer to a small number of examples. As a rough rule of thumb one can argue that (i) the role that national governments played in the evolution of the MDGs provides a good indication of how active or inactive their citizens were on this matter (ii) the specific issues that national governments pursued provides a strong indication of the relative interest of their citizens in aspects of global poverty reduction – both in a positive and a negative sense (iii) as best one can judge the publics of the rich world were more informed and more engaged in the processes of MDG formation than those of developing countries.

For the rich world one would have to admit that it was the issue of environmental sustainability, and particularly the Rio summit, that had the greatest resonance. Media coverage of the loss of biodiversity (and especially the charismatic mega-fauna of Africa and Asia along with whales), global climatic change and the loss of forests meant that much of the concern that was raised was about the impact of environmental change in poor countries on the survival of things valued by affluent westerners (such as elephants and tropical landscapes) as much as it was about the living conditions of poor people. One also needs to recognise the balancing off of concerns between particular groups. While many people in rich countries were alarmed at the loss of the ozone layer and the possibility of global warming (and some joined NGOs and campaign groups) there were equally large numbers who were concerned that the idea of environmental sustainability would mean an increase in their fuel bills and might even challenge their ‘right’ to drive.

In developmentally conscious Northern Europe – Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and UK – many of the UN summits and the development of the IDGs registered with the minority of citizens who took a personal interest in development. However, nowhere did these concerns reach the levels that arose when humanitarian disasters occurred – famine in the Horn of Africa, orphans in Romania, war in the former Yugoslavia, genocide in Rwanda, floods in Orissa. ‘Disasters’ always led to greater public action than the day to day grind of deprivation and structural poverty. In addition, it must be observed that the issues of trade reform, debt relief and increased foreign aid (Goal 8 issues) managed to receive more attention than issues such as universal education, improved health care and reduced mortality, ‘routine’ hunger and malnutrition. This was at least in part because of the effectiveness of the public outreach that debt relief (especially Jubilee 2000) and fair trade movements achieved in Northern Europe.

The contrast between what was happening in the UK and in the US in the late 1990s is particularly notable. In the UK Clare Short actively sought to take a lead in deepening public involvement in global poverty reduction through her public appearances, use of the media and staging events with UK civil society. In effect, the British state strove to raise its citizens understanding and concern about the poverty of distant strangers. In the US, as the Clinton regime struggled with its second term in office, the process was the exact opposite of the UK. As Republican control of Congress strengthened and public support for the Republicans increased the Democrats responded to reduced public interest in international development (and in foreign issues in general) and growing hostility from conservative Christians of any use of foreign aid that might support abortion or even family planning advice to the



unmarried, by taking less and less interest in poorer countries. In effect, the US state reduced its activities and commitment to global poverty reduction as it saw its citizens moving in this direction.

In developing countries it is difficult to track any public engagement with the process of MDG evolution except when summits were held. NGOs from developing countries participated in the UN conferences but it is unclear how actively they mobilised their fellow citizens. Women's and gender NGOs in many countries certainly did mobilise large rallies – but on education, HIV/AIDS, child health and other issues it is difficult to track any specific action. While the Millennium Summit and declaration registered in the media of most developing countries, not least because their President or Prime Minister was in New York at the event, there is little evidence that the IDGs or negotiations towards the MDGs were in the public imagination. My meetings with many different types of people in Asia and Africa over these years indicated that the only people who have a basic knowledge of the IDGs or Millennium declaration or MDGs are people working in the aid industry for governments, donors or NGOs. Even in these groups knowledge is very low and the public has never been fired up into the local equivalents of a 'Make Poverty History' campaign.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper has described the long, winding and unmapped road that led up to the MDGs. Through the lens of global public policy it analyses some of the key elements of these processes and the roles and reactions of the main actors. The agora shifted in terms of both its main venues and its main players, political bargaining interacted with technical analysis, powerful players changed their positions, multiple channels operated at the same time and serendipity occasionally permitted individuals to exercise human agency. With the wisdom of hindsight it seems quite remarkable that something as relatively coherent as the MDGs was eventually agreed. The navel-gazing of dispirited donors, a twin track process that nearly agreed a set of International Development Goals for the OECD and Millennium Declaration Goals for the UN, the lacklustre nature of *We the Peoples*, and the 'now you see it now you don't' skulduggery of the reproductive health goals were not auspicious ingredients. But, while the MDGs lack the cohesion of a clear theoretical framework they do include economic, social and environmental goals and recognise the roles and responsibilities of poorer and richer countries. Many confusions remain – most obviously disputes about whether they should only be monitored at the global level (Vandemoortele 2007) or whether they should be applied to the national level (UNDP 2003).

Systematically examining the present and potential outcomes of the MDGs – positive and negative – is beyond the scope of this paper. One can track some direct impacts such as President Bush launching the Millennium Challenge Account and increasing US aid, the UK government and DFID taking on a global leadership role in poverty reduction and more coordinated donor aid programming (Riddell 2007:221). Longer term, much will depend on how different players deal with the likely 'failure' of many countries, especially in Africa, to reach the goals. Northern Europe may respond by trying harder, but analysts such as Clemens (2004) believe that in the USA the media – which tends to be deeply critical of foreign aid and multilateral initiatives – will report 'MDG failure' in ways that will fan public disenchantment and make it likely that the US government will further disengage with the task of global poverty

reduction. Much will depend on the forms of simplification that the media utilise – will the MDG cup be presented as half full or half empty and how will the blame for ‘failure’ be apportioned between rich and poor countries?

Judgements will need to be based on evidence of outcomes on the ground – how much have indicators changed and how much is this attributable to the MDGs and their implementation<sup>xliii</sup>? They will also need to chart process outcomes, especially the long term impacts of the MDGs on political and public support for global poverty reduction. Fascinatingly, while much of the process leading up to agreement on the MDGs reveals the realpolitik of countries and interest groups these processes and the MDGs themselves have been a component of the moral vision that over the years has gradually shifted foreign aid towards a more developmental focus (Lumsdaine 1993) and that contributes to the promotion of a ‘one world’ normative framework (Singer 200?). In Europe support for foreign aid went from 76% in the late 1990s to 91% by late 2004 – the MDGs were part of the underpinning of this change. The MDGs were melded out of a mix of moral vision and realpolitik but their long term legacy may be the promotion of the moral vision and the constraining of the realpolitik of global poverty reduction.

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## Notes

<sup>i</sup> This includes all options from whole-hearted implementation of the MDG Plan (UN 2004) to abandonment of the entire venture.

<sup>ii</sup> At the UN conferences and multilateral meetings that are central to this paper a key factor explaining the processes and outcomes is 'who' is representing a country. For example, UN conferences such as the ICPD and the Women's Summit were attended, and agreements guided by, specialist ministers. They treated the issues quite differently from the generalist diplomats and (foreign affairs) ambassadors to the UN who later negotiated how to proceed with the agreements from the specialist conferences. It is only when Heads of State are around that comprehensive, cross-sectoral agreements can be envisaged.

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

<sup>iv</sup> Role of TANS and TENS etc.

<sup>v</sup> This included not having the Summit formally recognised as a UN Conference, which gave him and UNICEF greater control of the event and its declaration, but having it administered from the UN secretariat.

<sup>vi</sup> The DAC is comprised of the Ministers for International Development, or their equivalent, and ‘heads of agency’ for all OECD member countries. Its secretariat is based in Paris.

<sup>vii</sup> For example, ‘...Lady Chalker [the UK’s Minister for Overseas development]...deplored the fact that she received 95 per cent of her publicity for 15 per cent of her budget ie the share spent on humanitarian activities’ (DAC 1995b:7).

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

<sup>ix</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>x</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.’

<sup>xi</sup> There were only 6 bullet points as two commitments, infant/child and maternal mortality were rolled into one bullet point.

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

<sup>xiii</sup> Michael Walton (12.06.07)

<sup>xiv</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 HDR 1997.

<sup>xv</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>xvi</sup> I recall a private meeting with her in June 1997 when she identified ‘influencing the G8, World Bank and IMF’ as a priority for DFID. This was a dramatic change of policy from the Conservative era.

<sup>xvii</sup> Interviews with Evans, Eyben and Norton.

<sup>xviii</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>xix</sup> Evans and Eyben.

<sup>xx</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.

<sup>xxi</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>xxii</sup> For discussions of this alliance see Crossette 2004, Sen 2005 and Standing 2004.

<sup>xxiii</sup> *Reproductive health* is the complete physical, mental and social well-being 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 well-being by preventing and solving reproductive health problems (Standing 2004:240).

<sup>xxiv</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>xxv</sup> This extended to also blocking the maternal mortality reduction goal in the belief that this goal could be used as a wedge in the door to argue for abortion services to continue..

<sup>xxvi</sup> The Bank had a significant number of staff, including lead economists and not just ‘social development’ types, who believed that a reproductive health approach would significantly improve the condition of women and children and promote economic growth.

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<sup>xxvii</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’ (p27); ‘Women have become especially vulnerable to violence and sexual exploitation’

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

<sup>xxix</sup> The list in the conclusion differs and includes only 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’

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

<sup>xxxi</sup> While there were clear technical rationales behind these they also represented decisions about values and political preferences – for example, setting an inequality indicator for Goal 1 Target 1 worried neo-liberal(ish) economists who supported absolute poverty reduction but were concerned that treating inequality in negative terms might slow down economic growth.

<sup>xxxii</sup> The US was now clearly wavering on reproductive health rights.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Interviews with UN employees (Munro, ??) confirm that this technique is one that is used to reach agreements.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> This goal would have to wait until 2006 to be re-instated on the MDG list.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Many rich country representatives thought that comprehensive poverty reduction plans were a great idea for developing countries but knew that proposing such a device in their own countries would not be attractive to many domestically powerful political forces.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Having been developing indicators for the IDGs since the mid-1990s

<sup>xxxvii</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.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Subsequently some OECD countries have unilaterally set themselves targets (for example most European governments in OECD have set dates for achieving the 0.7% of GNP as aid target), but others – most obviously the US – have assiduously kept clear of such commitments.

<sup>xxxix</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’.

<sup>xl</sup> Ironically, those who believe most in the need for goals to be SMART were too smart to let their own choices be constrained by tight specification.

<sup>xli</sup> Most noticeably, China has started to play an active role in providing African countries with major infrastructural development projects, and has vastly increased the number of Africans training in China. Much of this aid is associated with Chinese access to natural resources in countries such as the Sudan, Angola, Zimbabwe and Nigeria.

<sup>xlii</sup> This will be methodologically demanding as there is no control group so empirical differences of differences comparisons will not be possible. In addition, analysts will need to compensate for benefits or gains from other factors.