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## Working Paper No. 10

### Lessons From the Operationalization of the MDGs

*By Gonzalo Pizarro*

December 2013

United Nations Development Programme

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Please cite this paper as:

Pizarro, G. (2013), "Lessons From the Operationalization of the MDGs", 2013 Global MDG Conference, UNDP Working Paper. No. 10, UNDP Publishing.

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### Abstract

The Internationally Agreed Development Goals (IADGs), including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), were designed as global yardsticks to measure how the world was progressing toward eight dimensions of development. This paper argues that a key lesson learned of the MDGs is that, in order to for any global development agenda to work, it needs to be rooted on a nationally, even subnationally owned development agenda through policies and investments that pursue such development goals. Through a historical analysis of the role of UNDP in translating the global agenda into national action, this paper argues that the international community can save important years after a new development framework is adopted by incorporating the lessons learned from the mainstreaming of the MDG agenda into national action.

### Keywords:

Millenium Development Goals, MDG-based National Development Strategies, Costing, Millenium Declaration, Needs Assessment, Planning, Financing, Implementation.

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### 1. Introduction

This paper will explore the foundations of the MDGs, their history, and how they took hold in the development practice. It will present a critical analysis of the main processes that UNDP has supported since the establishment of the MDGs for the mainstreaming of the MDGs into the development and policy arena.

The paper starts by introducing the conceptual foundations of the MDGs in the Millennium Declaration. It then discusses how, in the first five years, the MDGs were translated from a global to a nationally relevant agenda. It then looks at how the mainstreaming happened. Finally, it presents some conclusions that can be taken for any new sets of goals in a post-2015 world.

### 2. The conceptual framework: the millennium declaration

The principles that guide the work of the United Nations until today were laid out in *The United Nations Charter* (United Nations, 24 October 1945), which states that the UN aims to promote: international peace and security; friendly relations among nations based on equal rights and self-determination of peoples; international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character; international cooperation in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all; and the harmonization of the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends.

The principles and values of the UN have been consistently reaffirmed through international declarations and instruments that add contemporary and thematic detail to these timeless and general concerns. These include a series of declarations issued at international conferences held over the 1990s, which were held by development practitioners specialized in each area, governments, civil society, and other stakeholders. Some of the key summits and conferences of the 1990s that lay at the heart of the MDGs were:

- World Summit for Children, New York, 1990 (UNICEF)
- World Conference on Basic Education for All, Jomtien, 1990 (UNESCO)
- United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 1992
- World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, 1993 (OHCHR)
- International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 1994 (UN-DESA and UNFPA)
- Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995, Beijing (United Nations)
- World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 1995 (United Nations)

#### *The Millennium Summit*

The Millennium Summit is arguably the most important reaffirmation of the values of the United Nations. The Millennium Summit brought together representatives of 189 UN Member States—including 147 Heads of State or Government—in September 2000 to discuss the role of the United Nations in the new century. After three days of discussions, the assembled world leaders adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration (UN General Assembly, 2000).

The Millennium Declaration reaffirmed the faith of the world leaders in the UN and its Charter as indispensable foundations of a more peaceful, prosperous, and just world. It sets out clear directions in each of the following areas for Member States to follow:

- Values and principles
- Peace, security, and disarmament

## The conceptual framework: the millennium declaration

- Development and poverty eradication
- Protecting our common environment
- Human rights, democracy, and good governance
- Protecting the vulnerable
- Meeting special needs of Africa
- Strengthening the UN

Member States committed to “spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty” and to “create an environment—at the national and global levels alike—which is conducive to development and the elimination of poverty” through the Millennium Declaration (UN General Assembly, 2000). As part of this commitment, they resolved to achieve time-bound goals with clear strategies that will help achieve them for all countries. It reaffirmed the purposes of the United Nations and Member States’ international commitment to the core values of freedom, equality, solidarity, peace, security, and the rule of law.

The Declaration included a series of resolutions related to poverty and hunger, education, gender equality, maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS and other diseases, children’s health, living conditions in urban slums, youth employment, new partnerships with the private sector and civil society organizations (CSOs), and access to technology. Most of these resolutions were adapted from the International Development Goals published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1996, which summarizes the goals and targets laid out at the preceding UN Summits. What differs in the Millennium Declaration is the legitimacy provided by putting all these resolutions together in a broad context, rooted in the UN Charter, and agreed upon by an unprecedented number of Heads of State or Governments of Member States.

A follow-up resolution to the Declaration called on the Secretary-General of the United Nations to issue a “road map” describing in detail how these commitments would be fulfilled. The United Nations Secretariat subsequently convened consultations among members of the Secretariat and representatives of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), OECD, and the World Bank in order to make concrete the resolutions laid out in the Millennium Declaration. This group, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on MDG Indicators (IAEG), developed a comprehensive set of goals, targets, and indicators with which to track the achievement of the resolutions.

To facilitate the setting of national and international priorities, the group agreed on goals, targets, and indicators that are limited in number, stable over time, and communicable to a broad audience. Targets were set for the global level and were based on a simple projection that assumed development progress from 1990 to 2015 would be similar to that experienced during the preceding 25-year period, i.e., 1965 to 1990. Indicators to measure progress toward the goals were selected with a consideration of data availability and reliability. The resulting set of goals, targets, and indicators were named the Millennium Development Goals. In 2007, additional targets on employment, universal access to reproductive health, universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it, and related indicators have been added as part of the MDGs.<sup>1</sup>

### The Millennium Declaration, the MDGs and the Human Development Paradigm

The MDGs are the world’s time-bound and quantified targets for addressing extreme poverty in its many dimensions—income poverty, hunger, disease, lack of adequate shelter, and exclusion—while promoting gender equality, education, and environmental sustainability. Since their endorsement by the UN General Assembly in 2001, the MDGs have risen to the top of the development agenda and are the common focus of priorities for the development community.

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<sup>1</sup> The official United Nations list of goals, targets and indicators is available at: [mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Host.aspx?Content=Indicators/OfficialList.htm](http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Host.aspx?Content=Indicators/OfficialList.htm)

## The conceptual framework: the millennium declaration

In this way, the MDGs and their grounding in the Millennium Declaration come together to represent a holistic conception of development, a conception strongly linked to the human development paradigm that UNDP introduced in 1990. Specifically, human development recognizes that development is about much more than economic growth; the ultimate aim of development should be to create an enabling environment for people to live long and healthy lives, have knowledge, have a decent standard of living, and enjoy social and political freedoms.

Only with these capabilities will people be able to make choices that allow them to live in a way they value. Taken together, the MDGs and Millennium Declaration reflect this multifaceted goal.

### *The Early Years: Understanding a Global Agenda*

In 2002, the partnership for development was further articulated in the International conference on 'Financing for Development', held in Monterrey, Mexico, with respect to Official Development Assistance (ODA) (UNGA, 2002) in particular. It reformed the development compact by establishing responsibilities for developed countries (increase volume and quality of aid) as well as for developing nations (make aid more effective through improved governance and development management). In the Millennium and the Monterrey Declarations (UNGA, 2002), the focus was on low-income countries, with particular emphasis on those in sub-Saharan Africa.

In the first few years, from 2001 to 2004, the international community tried to grasp the implications of the MDGs. Specifically, the focus was on answering (i) whether they could be achieved; (ii) whether they could be afforded; and (iii) if so, what needed to be done to achieve them.

In response to these concerns, then-UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan created two special advisory bodies. One, the UN Millennium Campaign, was to deal with advocating the articulation of a complex, unknown issue such as global development and to engage Civil Society in the dialogue in order to make governments accountable for their commitments. The second advisory body, the UN Millennium Project (UNMP), was commissioned to answer the substantive questions of whether the MDGs were achievable and affordable and what was needed to actually achieve them.

In an attempt to answer these questions, the UNMP wrote the reports *Investing in Development* (UN Millennium Project, 2005) and accompanying Task Force Reports. In addressing some of these concerns, the UN Millennium Project concluded that the MDGs were indeed achievable, but needed a targeted effort, which, in many countries—and particularly in the least developed countries (LDCs)—meant technical and financial support. The technical support was within the existing body of knowledge for the different areas to be addressed and the financial support was within the 0.7 percent GNI committed by the developed countries as ODA. The UNMP also showed a possible roadmap to achieving the MDGs by mainstreaming them into National Development Strategies (NDS) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), this is, by developing MDG-based development and investment plans, including accompanying budgets and implementations strategies.

## 3. The 2005 summit mandate: translate a global agenda into national policy

At the 2005 Summit, the MDG-based NDS approach was endorsed and Member States requested the UN System to support the development of MDG-based National Development Strategies and PRSPs.

The focus now was squarely on attempting to integrate the MDGs into existing planning processes in order to specify what was needed to achieve specific targets, to identify the necessary policies, and how to link these strategies into annual budgeting processes for implementation.



## The 2005 summit mandate: translate a global agenda into national policy

### Mainstreaming the MDGs

The mainstreaming took different forms, as countries were vastly different. By 2008, UNDP had helped 73 countries to align their National Development Strategies or PRSPs with the MDGs. Figure 1 shows the status of the mainstreaming of the MDGs as of 2008.<sup>2</sup>

During the first half of the 2000' many Low-Income Countries (LICs) and LDCs, were looking to access lending programmes of the WB, and some of them also to qualify for the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative of debt relief. In order to access the lending programmes and the HIPC initiative, the WB requested the country to produce a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), later known as PRS. PRS outlines a country's external financing needs and summarizes macroeconomic, structural, and social policies and programmes to promote growth and reduce poverty. The PRS was later expanded and adopted by non-borrowing nations at varying levels of development for designing national development strategies without the conditionalities characterizing the initial model. The PRSPs were a key entry point for MDG mainstreaming, as the MDG targets and indicators were translated into national targets and provided a framework to make national development strategies MDG-based.

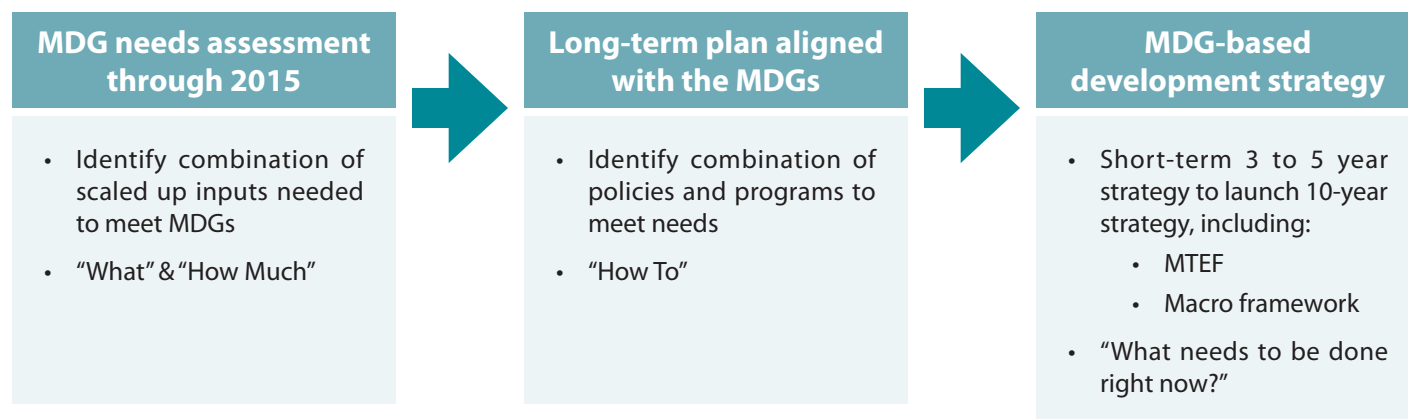
HIPC candidate countries needed to outline the investments they would make with the funds released from debt relief in the PRSP; this was a natural entry point for a comprehensive MDG approach to national planning. The UN Millennium Project and UNDP developed *Handbooks for Mainstreaming the MDGs into National Planning* (UNMP, 2005b; UNDP, 2005). MDG needs assessment tools were developed to acquaint country-level planners with the human resource, infrastructure, and financial needs of key MDG-related interventions. Complementary policy guidelines and tools for developing a sustainable fiscal space for MDG-related investments were developed.

### The Rationale of an MDG-based PRS/National Development Strategy

The PRS and National Development Strategies reflect the medium-term development goals of developing countries and are tools to make their long-term visions operational. Translating global targets into nationally relevant, agreed sectoral MDG targets which are inserted into their PRS/NDS processes makes the MDGs relevant to the national context and is a step toward national ownership.

Once the long-term plan is aligned with the MDGs, the MDG-based PRS/NDS is completed, identifying the three- to five-year strategy to implement it, including the budgets to translate them into action (Figure 1). This is done through instruments such as the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF), which allow countries to have a rolling window to programme their budgeting cycles in accordance to their stated priorities.

**Figure 1. Approach to Aligning National Development Strategies with the MDGs**



<sup>2</sup> UNDP internal survey for the MDG Steering Committee, part of the Operations Group, chaired by the Associate Administrator.

# The 2005 summit mandate: translate a global agenda into national policy

## The Needs Assessment Approach

### Concepts

The MDG Needs Assessment (NA) approach (UN Millennium Project, 2005) aimed to address the question, “Which interventions are needed across sectors to achieve the Goals, and what are the associated requirements in terms of human resources, infrastructure, and financing?” (UN Millennium Project, 2005)

To do so, the needs assessment attempted to identify who and where the poor are by targeting the population in need through an analysis that was as disaggregated (gender, urban/rural, ethnic, etc.) as possible. It then focused on what needed to be done by looking at public investments, including capital and operating costs, with a mid-term horizon at least until 2015 and including goods, services and infrastructure.

As part of the MDG Needs Assessment process, countries needed to translate the MDGs into operational targets, effectively localizing them, and to develop a strategy for increasing absorptive capacity. For the MDGs to be interpreted at the country level, quantitative outcome targets that are meaningful at the national level were defined, as were the areas of intervention required to meet each of the MDGs.

The structure of the NA allowed it to strengthen coherence between planning and budget processes, to guide programming of expenditures, and to provide a monitoring and accountability framework. In some countries, it was used to support the national policy dialogue and negotiations with development partners.

The basic assumption behind the NA approach is that meeting the MDGs requires growth and targeted investment—that is, economic growth is necessary, but not sufficient, to achieve the MDGs.

In order to make progress on some MDGs, there is a need to directly target the poor and left behind, which will have as a consequence a reduction in inequality as well. This requires direct investments in people, infrastructure, and the environment (UN Millennium Project, 2005). For example, Malaysia and Sri Lanka halved their maternal mortality ratios every six to 12 years between 1950 and 1990, demonstrating that political commitment to ensuring the implementation of targeted interventions to make services available and used can work, even when GDP is relatively low (UN Millennium Project, 2005).

It was also acknowledged that public investments in MDG-related sectors, such as health, education, and gender equality, are critical for growth (UN Millennium Project, 2005). This is due to the fact that, in order to attract and sustain investment in a country, private-sector-led growth requires minimum standards in health, education, and infrastructure. To be able to attain this synergy, directly targeted investments in these areas must complement good economic policies.

### ***Box 1. Guiding Principles for Aligning MDG Processes with Existing Planning Mechanisms (UN Millennium Project, 2005)***

- ‘Absorptive capacity’ constraints are real in the short term, but can be gradually relaxed through investments in human resources, infrastructure, and management systems
- Identify all interventions that require full or partial public financing
- Include capital and operating costs for all sectors
- Undertake total, not incremental, costing
- Strive for maximum disaggregation
- Ensure maximum transparency so that assumptions can be adapted to countries’/cities’ needs. No “one-size-fits all”!
- Periodic revision of targets/interventions based on new information and implementation of programmes



## The 2005 summit mandate: translate a global agenda into national policy

Another assumption was that public investments in LDCs are key due to the lack of market returns, meaning that the poor cannot afford to pay for the use of basic infrastructure; and the presence of public goods, such as health, public transportation; and the environment.

The *Handbook* (UN Millennium Project, 2005) specifies an approach to creating an MDG-based PRS. All necessary inputs need to be covered; investment strategies need to be integrated and focused on outcomes. The UN Millennium Project (UN Millennium Project, 2005) proposes several investment clusters for the MDGs:

- Gender equality
- Education
- Health systems (including sexual and reproductive health)
- Agricultural productivity
- Water supply, sanitation, and water resource management
- Energy
- Transport
- Environmental management
- Slum upgrading and urban planning
- Trade facilitation
- Science, technology, and innovation
- Regional infrastructure
- Others as needed

A core aspect of the methodology described in the *Handbook* was the MDG Needs Assessment approach, which will be described below.

### The MDG Needs Assessment Process

This methodology was originally developed by the UN Millennium Project and then mainstreamed into UNDP's practice when the UN System was given the mandate to "support countries in developing MDG-based strategies" (UNGA, 2005). Here, the MDG Support Team was created in the Bureau for Development Policy BDP as part of the Poverty Group of UNDP. It held regional capacity-building workshops that allowed policy advisors in all the Regional Bureau (RBx) to respond to the demand for these services.

MDG needs assessments became the analytical building blocks for developing MDG-based poverty reduction strategies. This approach marks a fundamental shift from current practice to strategy design, which asks the question, "How can governments best allocate existing resources?" Traditional sectoral work is thus based on forming annual budget allocations in a resource-constrained setting. The MDG Needs Assessment aimed instead at helping countries to identify the needed resources to achieve the MDGs over a 10-year period. These estimates became inputs for MDG investment strategies, which included sequencing and capacity-building.

By developing MDG-based National Development Strategies and using needs assessments as one of its steps, countries embarked on processes that forced them to localize goals and targets, to develop strategies for increasing 'absorptive capacity', and to strengthen coherence between planning and budget processes and guide programming of expenditures, as seen in Figure 1. The methodology forced interministerial collaboration, provided a monitoring and accountability framework, and supported the national policy dialogue and negotiations with development partners.

## The 2005 summit mandate: translate a global agenda into national policy

The final step in the process was to prepare an MDG financing strategy, i.e., the fiscal space to evaluate options for financing the MDG-based strategy (Figure 1). The aspects of an MDG financing strategy (Figure 2) included estimating financing needs (already done through the MDG NA); preparing an MDG-consistent macro framework; projecting government resource mobilization; estimating household contributions; identifying any MDG financing gap (debt relief and development assistance); and identifying a strategy for maintaining macro-stability. Options included expanding the public revenue base in the form of tax relief, debt relief, domestic or international borrowing, grants, loans, options offered by carbon and environmental commodities, and others. Furthermore, they were supported in developing medium-term public investment programmes, including Medium-Term Expenditure Frameworks (MTEF) consistent with needs assessments.

To be considered MDG-based, any National Development Strategy had to comply with five core features:

1. Ambition: National targets are at least as ambitious as MDG targets for 2015
2. Scope: The range of sectors identified is broad enough to achieve all MDGs
3. Rigor: For each sector, the strategy is based on a detailed, bottom-up needs assessment
4. Timeline: The medium-term strategy is nested in a 10-year MDG framework (taking into consideration that this condition was stated in 2005)
5. Financing: Financing strategy is determined in line with each country's needs

Preparing an MDG-consistent macroeconomic framework was a fundamental step to completing the process, as it allowed the development of a macro framework in support of public investments after the public expenditures had been mapped out (for example, Ethiopia's *Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty*, 2006).

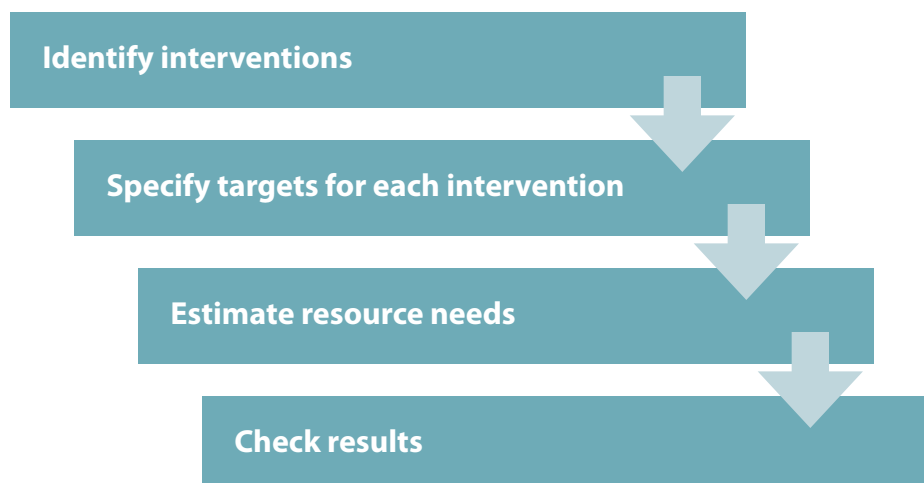
Once outcome targets have been set, there are four steps in conducting a needs assessment, illustrated in Figure 3 below.

In 2006, Ethiopia published its Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP), which was fully MDG-based and followed the methodology proposed by the UNMP. The introduction of the publication states, "In effect, PASDEP is explicitly linked to the MDGs and constitutes Ethiopia's medium-term plan for achieving the MDGs" (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, Government of Ethiopia, 2006).

**Figure 2. Elements of an MDG Financing Strategy**



**Figure 3. Steps in an MDG Needs Assessment**



*Source: UNMP, 2005*

### **Box 2. 2006 Ethiopia's PASDEP**

The 2006 Ethiopia's PASDEP considered two main sections. First, a sectoral analysis that considered the expansion of the supply of basic social services to the population as well as the development of basic infrastructure to promote growth. The second section presents the macroeconomic implications of the sectoral interventions.

The sectors considered were:

- Agriculture and rural development
- Education
- Health and HIV/AIDS
- Water resource development
- Roads
- Telecommunications
- Energy
- Capacity-building and good governance
- Industrial development and small-scale employment generation
- Urban development
- Gender and development

The PASDEP analysed the financing options, including its medium-term resource envelope and projected overall spending using a base-case scenario, and a high-resource availability scenario. The PASDEP found that there would be a GDP funding gap of 4.7 percent (base-case) to 3.5 percent (high-resource availability) concentrated in the first two years, due to the frontloading of infrastructure investments if macroeconomic stability is to be preserved.

## The 2005 summit mandate: translate a global agenda into national policy

The limitations of the MDG Needs Assessment approach are that:

- It is time-intensive to develop detailed investment models
- Data needs are high
- Cross-sectoral dynamics cannot be modeled dynamically, but require iterative adjustment of coverage targets
- It requires links to macroeconomic dynamics that need to be modeled with the help of separate tools
- It does not identify complementary policies and institutional reforms

### MDG Costing in MICs

For middle-income countries, where the capacity for service delivery was mostly in place, the approach was different. Macroeconomic analytical models determined the optimal level of investments that a country needed to make in each sector in order to achieve the MDGs (Vos, Ganuza, Lofgren, & Díaz-Bonilla, 2010).

These approaches were in many cases complementary, particularly for low-income countries and lower-middle income countries, and mostly aimed at MICs. The macroeconomic models addressed the question, “What aggregate level of investment is required to meet individual Goals?” To do so, they looked at the input-outcome relationships based on historical elasticities that apply only to marginal changes in investment levels.

The investments required in some of the social sectors in order to reach the MDGs, namely health or education, would go beyond what had been done in the historical record, hence the elasticities on which these models were based to provide the forecasts were, in the case of LDCs, questionable. Furthermore, it is unrealistic to attempt to roll out such models for LDCs because of the large amount of country-specific data needed (Atisophon, Bueren, G., & and Stijns, 2011). The MAMS-type tool<sup>3</sup> provided important information to countries, since these tools estimated the impact on growth and relative prices, forecasted financing options, and estimated sector synergies.

## 4. The 2010 summit: demand for acceleration

By 2008, the midpoint of the MDGs, most countries had technically sound, MDG-based national or sectoral strategies in place. Tremendous progress was being achieved globally on the MDGs, but some alarming trends were also becoming evident. At a global or regional aggregate level, not all MDGs were progressing equally, and not all countries were progressing equally toward all MDGs, and at a country level, not all MDGs were progressing at the same pace.

Nevertheless, more than two thirds of the countries that are not on-track—usually due to violence and crisis/post-crisis—are close to being on track (World Bank & International Monetary Fund, 2011). A decade of experience allowed the compilation of a wealth of evidence about what does and does not work under which circumstances to achieve the MDGs.

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3 MAMs (Maquette for MDG Simulations): a dynamic Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) model extended to cover the generation of outcomes in terms of growth, MDGs, and the educational make-up of the labor force, as well as the interaction of these outcomes with other aspects of economic performance. The government policies considered include: (i) spending levels and allocation across different areas, including education, health, and infrastructure; (ii) policies for taxation, domestic and foreign borrowing, and foreign aid; and (iii) economic performance, measured by the evolution of poverty and other MDG targets; macro indicators such as GDP; composition of government budget, balance of payments, savings-investment balance; total factor productivity; domestic and foreign debt stocks; sectoral structure of production, employment, incomes, and trade; and labour market: unemployment and educational composition of the labour force. For more details on the tool, see [www.tinyurl.com/MAMSdevpolicy](http://www.tinyurl.com/MAMSdevpolicy)

## The 2010 summit: demand for acceleration

Thus, at the 2010 MDG Summit, the international community focused on what could be done to sustainably accelerate achievement of the MDGs, while recognizing that volatility is a newly normal reality and shocks and crises stemming from economic, political, climate, food, and energy risks are ever more frequent. Similarly, participants recognized that there are significant multiplier effects across the MDGs, with synergistic returns to investments in (i) women's empowerment; (ii) health; (iii) education; (iv) environmental sustainability and resilience; (v) employment-intensive growth; (vi) agricultural innovation; and (vii) energy access to all.

As a response to this call, UNDP developed the MDG Acceleration Framework (MAF), later endorsed by the UNDG, which is a systematic methodology to support countries in their efforts to identify the bottlenecks that prevent existing MDG-related strategies and programmes from achieving their intended impact. The Framework results in an MDG Action Plan endorsed by all relevant stakeholders and specifies cost, deadlines, and responsible parties. To date, it has been applied in 46 countries.

Some of the key lessons learned from the MDGs are that development happens when the following elements are present (UNDP, 2010):

- Effective government leadership and national ownership of National Development Strategies
- Effective policies to support implementation
- Improved quantity, quality, and focus of investments, financed by domestic sources and international development assistance and based on a holistic approach
- Appropriate institutional capacity to deliver quality services equitably on a national scale and effective monitoring and evaluation
- Civil society and community involvement and empowerment
- Effective global partnerships involving all relevant stakeholders, with mutual accountability of all stakeholders
- Good governance by donors and recipients

Additionally, going beyond the numbers, the MDGs have provided a strong political impetus for development by (Bourguignon, 2008):

- Bringing renewed attention to development
- Reversing the downward trend in aid that began in the 1990s
- Reforming the development compact
- Representing a movement, involving citizens, communities, and civil society, for holding governments accountable for being a signatory to the Millennium Declaration

Despite this, the MDGs have also received strong criticism, mainly because the normative issues contained in the Millennium Declaration, such as human rights, peace, governance, equity and non-discrimination, were lost by focusing on quantitative time-bound goals.

As we approach the 2015 mark and efforts to accelerate achievement of the MDGs are in full swing, discussions about what kind of post-2015 development framework should follow are heating up. Despite the wide varying proposals, the International Community at the UNCSD 2012 (UNGA, 2012) in Rio provided some basic principles to guide the development of the post-2015 framework:

- The lessons learned from the MDGs, including the global political impetus for development, should be the basis of a post-2015 development framework (UNGA, 2012)
- The process for agreeing on a new post-2015 framework should be participatory, inclusive, and Member-State-driven while anchored in the UN System (UNGA, 2012)
- The post-2015 framework must be anchored in the logic of universal applicability, with a common, but differentiated responsibility

### 5. Conclusion: some lessons from the operationalization of the MDGs to be taken into account for the development of the post-2015 framework

Several aspects need to be taken into consideration when operationalizing a development framework that has global targets. Even though policy needs to be applied at the national or local level, it needs to be comparable across countries. Simple linear projections and aggregates are not enough to translate the information into comparable cross-national data or to understand the levels of uncertainty that the data carries (Abayomi & Pizarro, 2013)

We cannot afford to again spend three or four years to understand whether the development framework adopted is feasible and how to operationalize it. Some specific lessons from the needs assessment roll-out are:

- 1. Be clear about what the process can and cannot provide:** LDCs and LICs had high expectations when they started developing MDG-based strategies. These were the years when the Monterrey Conference with its 0.7 GNI commitment and the Gleneagles G8 Conference with its doubling of aid to Africa by 2015 commitment were fresh. Yet significant increases in aid were not materialized (MDG Gaps Report, 2012). This limited the impact, as the expectation of this exercise in many countries was that it would lead to increases in ODA.
- 2. Interministerial and cross-sectoral coordination is key, including with the private sector:** Where the NA was successful, it avoided double-counting and produced significant synergies across sectors as a result of coordination among those sectors. Variations in the quality of sector results were largely a function of execution, not due to the methodology in itself. This lesson has been incorporated into methodologies such as the MAF.
- 3. Localization and ownership are key to success:** Explicit targets and interventions provide a budgeting and accountability framework. Intervention targets are policy variables and need to be made explicit. Sector results are relatively robust (cf. health and education). The relevance of ownership cannot be underestimated. The political will to take the next steps in these processes will make the difference between a report resting on a shelf and a living policy being implemented. The MAF, for example, has taken this lesson to heart by not initiating the rollout of the framework if there is no local ownership, hence, no potential for implementation.
- 4. Excessive focus on the planning process did not look into the implementation cycle:** The NA process developed under the assumption that, once planning was fully MDG-based, implementation would follow as normal. This did not consider the political economy surrounding the PRSP process.



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