
MDGs and SDGs

Lessons Learned and Moving Forward

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ABBREVIATIONS

ECOSOC	The United Nations Economic and Social Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
GNP	Gross National Product
HLP	High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OWG	Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals
Rio+20	United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; 20-22 June 2012)
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDSN	Sustainable Development Solutions Network
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNGC	United Nations Global Compact
WHO	World Health Organisation

In 2015, the UN General Assembly ushered in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals were broad in scope, ranging from ensuring access to affordable, sustainable energy to the conservation of oceans, ending hunger, and empowering women and girls. But these goals were not the first of their kind, though they were an improvement. Instead, the SDGs followed in the footsteps of the first generation of development goals, established 15 years earlier: the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs were, at the same time, extraordinarily successful (the global poverty rate was halved within just a decade and a half) and yet woefully inadequate. Their implementation was, at best, uneven and the goals neglected to address the responsibility of wealthy states beyond that of providing funding. In fact, the failures of the MDGs were far more numerous than their successes. While the SDGs did, in fact, improve upon the MDGs, their prospects for success are dim in the light of unaddressed inadequacies and the current economic forecast in China.

The following essay will provide an overview of the creation of the MDGs, followed by an in-depth examination of the relative success of each of the eight MDGs and the successes and failures of the MDGs as a unit. It will then discuss the process of creating the SDGs, how lessons learned from the MDGs informed SDG formation, and then the SDGs' prospects for success.

THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGS)

The Making of the MDGS

In 1995, the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, held under the auspices of the UN, produced a final report that listed ten commitments “relating to creating an enabling environment for social development, eradicating poverty, promoting full employment, social integration and human rights protection.”¹ Within these commitments, the report repeatedly stated the need to “adopt international development goals [focusing] on meeting basic needs and eradicating poverty.”² In response, a committee within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) developed a list of goals to achieve the commitments made in Copenhagen.³ In 2000, the OECD, UN, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Bank issued the joint publication, “A Better World For All: Progress towards the international development goals,” in which the four organizations committed to seven development goals, based on the goals put forward by the OECD in 1996, that later evolved into the Millennium Development Goals.⁴

That same year, the UN Millennium Summit was held, producing the now-famous Millennium Declaration. The Declaration was later credited as the inspiration for the MDGs. The Declaration, however, had a broader mandate than economic development. It listed six fundamental values essential to international relations in the 21st century (freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature, and shared responsibility) and had chapters focusing on peace, security, and disarmament; development and poverty eradication; protecting our common environment; human rights, democracy and good governance; protecting the vulnerable; meeting the special needs of Africa; and strengthening the United Nations.⁵ Within Chapter Three, the chapter on development and poverty eradication, states committed to a list of targets. These targets have largely been considered the source of the MDGs. Despite these widely-publicized claims that all states joined together in the Millennium Declaration in 2000 to promote economic development by creating quantitative international goals, the goals were actually set four years before the Millennium Summit in 1996 by the OECD.

The Individual Goals and Their Relative Successes by Region

The resulting MDGs contained eight development goals and 18 development targets, all to be achieved by 2015. The first MDG (MDG 1) aimed to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. Because the very purpose of the MDGs was to eradicate poverty, the success or failure of this goal is often used to determine the success or failure of the MDGs as a whole. More specifically, the first goal aimed to half extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. At the global level, poverty was halved five years ahead of schedule.⁶ In fact, this target was still achieved by 2015 despite redefining “extreme

¹ Otto Spijkers and Arron Honniball, "MDGs and SDGs: Lessons Learnt from Global Public Participation in the Drafting of the UN Development Goals," *German Review on the United Nations* 62, no. 6 (2014), accessed December 10, 2016, <http://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/306264>; United Nations World Summit for Social Development, *Report of the World Summit for Social Development*, 1995, accessed December 10, 2016, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N95/116/51/IMG/N9511651.pdf?OpenElement>.

² Otto Spijkers and Arron Honniball, "MDGs and SDGs: Lessons Learnt from Global Public Participation in the Drafting of the UN Development Goals," *German Review on the United Nations* 62, no. 6 (2014), accessed December 10, 2016, <http://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/306264>.

³ The OECD is a group of wealthy states whose self-proclaimed purpose is “to promote policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.” These recommendations were published in a booklet entitled “Shaping the 21st Century: The Contribution of Development Co-operation.”

⁴ Notably, the OECD, UN, IMF, and World Bank ignored a set of development goals put forward by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in “We the Peoples: the Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century,” with the exception of those goals that Annan likewise adopted from the OECD. Otto Spijkers and Arron Honniball, "MDGs and SDGs: Lessons Learnt from Global Public Participation in the Drafting of the UN Development Goals," *German Review on the United Nations* 62, no. 6 (2014), accessed December 10, 2016, <http://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/306264>.

⁵ UN General Assembly, *United Nations Millennium Declaration*, 2000, accessed December 10, 2016, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3b00f4ea3.html>.

⁶ United Nations, *We Can End Poverty: The Millennium Development Goals and Beyond 2015 Goal 1 Fact Sheet*, 2013, accessed December 10, 2016, http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Goal_1_fs.pdf.

poverty” as living on \$1.00 a day to \$1.25 a day.⁷ According to the UN, the only region that failed to achieve this target was Sub-Saharan Africa⁸ (although it’s important to note that, as of 2010, Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for nearly half of individuals living in extreme poverty).⁹

MDG 2 aimed to achieve universal primary education. While Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Caucasus and South Asia underachieved this target, each of these regions were close to meeting the minimum requirements.¹⁰

MDG 3 promoted gender equality and the empowerment of women. More specifically, MDG 3’s purpose was to “[e]liminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015,” though the UN also began to measure women’s share of paid employment as well as women’s equal representation in parliaments.¹¹ Equal girls’ enrollment in primary school was largely successful, with Oceania being the only region failing to fulfill its obligations. The success of the indicator on women’s equal share in employment was disappointing, however, with half of regions underachieving.

MDG 4 aimed to reduce child mortality and measured progress towards this goal by aspiring to reduce the mortality rates of children under five years-old by two-thirds. Excepting the last MDG target under MDG 8 (aimed at increasing the number of internet users), this target was the most successful target. The only region which failed to fully achieve this target was Oceania.¹²

MDG 5 sought to improve maternal health by reducing maternal mortality by two-thirds. While it is true that maternal mortality was significantly reduced between 2000 and 2015 (the number of maternal deaths was reduced from 523,000 to 289,000 in 2013), the rate of decline was less than half of what was necessary to fulfill the obligations of this target, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).¹³ Included within the MDG were indicators measuring progress towards universal access to reproductive health. However, as of 2014, 17 percent of women had no access to antenatal care and, in Africa, only 51 percent of births are attended by skilled personnel.¹⁴

MDG 6 sought to combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and other diseases. It had two measures of success. The first target was to halt and to begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS. WHO has noted substantial progress towards halting and reversing HIV/AIDS. “In 2013 an estimated 2.1 million people were newly infected with HIV – down from 3.4 million in 2001.”¹⁵ The number of individuals receiving antiretroviral therapy increased significantly, with the overwhelming majority of individuals receiving this treatment in low- and middle-income countries.¹⁶ The second target aimed at halting and reversing the incidence of malaria and other major diseases (including malaria and tuberculosis).¹⁷ WHO stated that significant progress has also been made towards both goals

⁷ United Nations, *We Can End Poverty: The Millennium Development Goals and Beyond 2015 Goal 1 Fact Sheet*, 2013, accessed December 10, 2016, http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Goal_1_fs.pdf.

⁸ United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals: 2015 Progress Chart*, 2015, accessed December 10, 2016, http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20PC%20final.pdf.

⁹ “10 Poverty in Africa Facts,” The Borgen Project, June 14, 2016, accessed December 10, 2016, <http://borgenproject.org/10-quick-facts-about-poverty-in-africa/>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ “Goals, Targets & Indicators,” UN Millennium Project, accessed December 11, 2016, <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/goals/gti.htm>; United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals: 2015 Progress Chart*, 2015, accessed December 10, 2016, http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20PC%20final.pdf.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “Millennium Development Goals (MDGs),” World Health Organization, May 2015, accessed December 13, 2016, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs290/en/>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ “Millennium Development Goals (MDGs),” World Health Organization, May 2015, accessed December 13, 2016, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs290/en/>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ “Goals, Targets & Indicators,” UN Millennium Project, accessed December 11, 2016, <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/goals/gti.htm>; United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals: 2015 Progress Chart*, 2015, accessed December 10, 2016, http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20PC%20final.pdf.

globally. Incidents of malaria and tuberculosis declined, achieving the target to halt and reverse the spread of the two diseases. The mortality rate of malaria also decreased.¹⁸

MDG 7, the goal on ensuring environmental sustainability, was arguably the least successful MDG with nearly half of regions severely underperforming on one or more targets.¹⁹ The goal contains three targets. The first target aimed to “[i]ntegrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources.” The UN measured this goal using the proportion of land covered by forest, the ratio of area protected to maintain biological diversity to surface area, energy use per \$1 GDP, carbon dioxide emissions per capita, and the proportion of the population using solid fuels.²⁰ The second target sought to halve the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. The third target attempted to improve the lives of at least of 100 million slum dwellers by 2020. The indicator measuring the success of this goal was the number of households with access to “secure tenure,” as measured by UN-HABITAT.²¹ Most regions demonstrated progress towards this target. Climate change, however, was not directly addressed in MDG 7.

MDG 8, tasked with creating a Global Partnership for Development, had seven different targets, including developing a predictable trading and financial system, addressing the needs of the Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States, and more.²² It was also the MDG with the broadest mandate. In a progress report published by the UN in 2015, the UN published only the progress towards the last target, namely the success of regions in increasing the number of internet users. By this measure alone, MDG 8 appears to be the most successful MDG as every region was able to demonstrate substantial progress towards achieving this indicator though this is severely misleading.²³

By far, the region with the most difficulty when implementing the MDGs was Oceania. Of the 18 MDG targets, Oceania was only able to demonstrate success in four indicators: universal primary schooling, reducing maternal mortality by three-quarters, halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS, and increasing the number of internet users. According to the *Millennium Development Goals: 2015 Progress Chart*, the most successful region was Southern Asia which demonstrated progress in every measure. The only indicator that Southern Asia failed to achieve in its entirety was an indicator on halving the proportion of the population without sanitation. The four least performing MDGs according to the UN were MDG 1 (eradicate extreme poverty and hunger), MDG 3 (promote gender equality and empower women), MDG 6 (combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases), and MDG 7 (ensure environmental sustainability). These four MDGs were the only MDGs demonstrating a severe deficiency in progress in at least one region, though each of these four MDGs showed insufficient progress towards targets in several regions.²⁴ \

¹⁸ Improvements are additionally needed to halt and reverse the spread of tuberculosis in Northern Africa; "Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)," World Health Organization, May 2015, accessed December 13, 2016, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs290/en/>; United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals: 2015 Progress Chart*, 2015, accessed December 10, 2016, http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20PC%20final.pdf.

¹⁹ United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals: 2015 Progress Chart*, 2015, accessed December 10, 2016, http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20PC%20final.pdf.

²⁰ "Goals, Targets & Indicators," UN Millennium Project, accessed December 11, 2016, <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/goals/gti.htm>; United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals: 2015 Progress Chart*, 2015, accessed December 10, 2016, http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20PC%20final.pdf.

²¹ "Goals, Targets & Indicators," UN Millennium Project, accessed December 11, 2016, <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/goals/gti.htm>; United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals: 2015 Progress Chart*, 2015, accessed December 10, 2016, http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20PC%20final.pdf.

²² "Goals, Targets & Indicators," UN Millennium Project, accessed December 11, 2016, <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/goals/gti.htm>; United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals: 2015 Progress Chart*, 2015, accessed December 10, 2016, http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20PC%20final.pdf.

²³ United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals: 2015 Progress Chart*, 2015, accessed December 10, 2016, http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20PC%20final.pdf.

²⁴ United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals: 2015 Progress Chart*, 2015, accessed December 10, 2016, http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20PC%20final.pdf.

Successes and Failures in Achieving the MDGs

Looking at the statistics above, one could easily argue that the MDGs were either a profound success or a significant failure. During the period between 2000 and 2015, international economic development progressed substantially, but developing countries did not achieve the MDGs in their entirety. Jeffrey Sachs, a well-known leader in the field of Sustainable Development, summarized:

*[The MDGs generated] incentives to improve performance, even if not quite enough incentives for both rich and poor countries to produce a global class of straight-A students. Developing countries have made substantial progress towards achievement of the MDGs, although the progress is highly variable across goals, countries, and regions... Some countries will achieve all or most of the MDGs, whereas others will achieve very few.*²⁵

Structurally, the MDGs have their advantages. Phillip Alston, a scholar at NYU and an expert in economic and social rights argued in 2005 that the MDGs had four positive characteristics. First, the goals were limited and thus “prioritize[d] certain objectives over the many others endorsed every year by the international community.”²⁶ Second, the goals had quantitative indicators that allowed the goals to be measured and states to be held accountable for their implementation. Third, the goals were time-bound, preventing a “progressive realization.” Finally, Alston states that “an extensive institutional apparatus [was] set up to promote them” (e.g. the Millennium Project, the Millennium Campaign, efforts to produce national MDG reports in every developing country, and “highly focused efforts by virtually every major international development agency.”)²⁷ Excepting the last advantage, scholars often repeat this praise of the MDGs specificity, its quantitative indicators, and its time-bound nature. Jeffrey Sachs, for example, reiterates many of these advantages,

*By packaging these priorities into an easily understandable set of eight goals, and by establishing measurable and timebound objectives, the MDGs help to promote global awareness, political accountability, improved metrics, social feedback, and public pressures...*²⁸

The failings of the MDGs, however, are far more numerous. As noted earlier, even Jeffrey Sachs noted the structural limitations of the MDGs. The MDGs seemed to be severely handicapped from their conception. Instead of representing global development goals, defined and created by the international community at large, the MDGs were developed by the wealthiest states in the international arena and only later agreed upon by member states. The Millennium Summit and the Millennium Declaration received input from NGOs, states, the business community, social movements, etc., but the OECD formed the MDGs years before these inputs were solicited. As was discussed in the introduction, if one examines both the Millennium Declaration (2000) and “Shaping the 21st Century” (the recommendations put forward by the OECD in 1996) the MDGs are nearly identical to those proposed by the OECD. In fact, the recommendations provided by the OECD lack only two of the goals later to be named the Millennium Development Goals: MDG 7 on combatting HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and other diseases and MDG 8 on developing a global partnership

²⁵ Jeffrey D. Sachs, "From Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals," *The Lancet* 379 (June 2012), accessed December 13, 2016

²⁶ While this argument appears to be most common, Keyzer and Van Wesenbeeck argue that the limited scope of the MDGs likewise proved to be a disadvantage because they caused the “omission of important issues and underinvestment in other key areas of development.” Maya Fehling, Brett D. Nelson, and Sridhar Venkatapuram, "Limitations of the Millennium Development Goals: A Literature Review," *Global Public Health*, December 2013, accessed December 15, 2016, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3877943/#R58>; Michiel Keyzer and Lia Van Wesenbeeck, "The Millennium Development Goals, How Realistic Are They?," *Economist-Netherlands* 154 (2006), accessed December 15, 2016, doi:10.1007/s10645-006-9019-9.

²⁷ Phillip Alston, "Ships Passing in the Night: The Current State of the Human Rights and Development Debate Seen through the Lens of the Millennium Development Goals," *Human Rights Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2005): 756, accessed December 14, 2016, <http://its.law.nyu.edu/faculty/profiles/representativeFiles/Alston%20>

²⁸ Jeffrey D. Sachs, "From Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals," *The Lancet* 379 (June 2012), accessed December 13, 2016.

for development. Otherwise, the MDGs and the OECD's recommendations are mirror images. In fact, even the ordering of the MDGs is identical to that of the original OECD recommendations.²⁹ In this way, the MDGs represented the interests of wealthy states more so than the international community at large, though member states did approve to institute these goals at the UN General Assembly in 2000.

The MDGs further focused their attention on developing countries, almost entirely ignoring the wealthy states. Ashwani Saith states that the focus on developing countries "ghettoize[d] the problem of development and locate[d] it firmly in the third world."³⁰ Instead of requiring minimum standards of development for the wealthiest states, these wealthy countries were obligated to provide development assistance to developing states (specifically 0.7 percent of GNP in Official Development Assistance [ODA]). Even with this obligation, wealthy states failed to provide funding for international development efforts. To this day, only six states have met this obligation (though not necessarily consistently): Sweden, Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg, and the United Kingdom, and while ODA has continually increased since 1970, net ODA as a share of GNI was only 0.29 percent in 2014.³¹ Without the appropriate funding, developing states could not reasonably be expected to achieve all MDG indicators.

The MDGs were successful in certain aspects, of course. The poverty rate halved between the years 1990 and 2010, and this enormous success is worthy of celebration.³² However, several scholars argue that rapid economic growth in China caused this success.³³ MDG success across other regions and developing countries was uneven, however (as was demonstrated earlier in the case of Oceania). It's also important to note that China's economic growth began in 1978, 22 years before the implementation of the MDGs. Once again, however, this growth was already evident decades before the MDGs were in place and continued seemingly despite the MDGs. Instead of the MDGs proving successful then, it appears that, given this data, the MDGs happened to occur during an already prosperous decade and a half.

Finally, while it is valuable that the MDGs had measurable indicators, and while substantial efforts were made to produce national MDG reports in developing countries, the reliability of data regarding the MDGs is incomplete. In a joint project titled, *Equity and Growth in a Globalizing World*, published by the World Bank, a group of scholars state that only a limited number of countries "are equipped with national statistical agencies that produce high quality national survey programs and provide the information needed to rigorously monitor the MDGs." These countries include a few in Latin America, as well as China, India, Indonesia, South Africa, and Thailand.³⁴ Even the states that do have the capacity to monitor the MDGs have an incentive to inflate the results for the sake of reputation or foreign investments. While UN Country Teams could perhaps verify these statistics, given an appropriate amount of time, money, and resources, the UN cannot publish results contrary to those provided by member states because to do so would violate state sovereignty and deteriorate the relationship between member states and the UN System.

²⁹ *Shaping the 21st Century: The Contribution of Development Cooperation* (1996), accessed December 11, 2016, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/2508761.pdf>; UN General Assembly, *United Nations Millennium Declaration*, 2000, accessed December 10, 2016, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3b00f4ea3.html>.

³⁰ Ashwani Saith, "From Universal Values to Millennium Development Goals: Lost in Translation," *Development and Change* 37, no. 6 (2006), accessed December 15, 2016, doi:10.1111/j.1467-7660.2006.00518.x.

³¹ "Development Aid Stable in 2014 but Flows to Poorest Countries Still Falling." OECD Development Assistance Committee, April 8, 2015. Accessed December 15, 2016. <https://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/documentupload/ODA%202014%20Technical%20Note.pdf>; "History of the 0.7% ODA Target," *OECD DAC Journal*, March 2016, accessed December 15, 2016, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/ODA-history-of-the-0-7-target.pdf>.

³² Jeffrey D. Sachs, "From Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals," *The Lancet* 379 (June 2012), accessed December 13, 2016.

³³ Ibid; François Bourguignon et al., "The Millennium Development Goals: An Assessment," in *Equity and Growth in a Globalizing World*, ed. Ravi Kanbur and Michael Spence (Washington, DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank, 2010), 20.

³⁴ François Bourguignon et al., "The Millennium Development Goals: An Assessment," in *Equity and Growth in a Globalizing World*, ed. Ravi Kanbur and Michael Spence (Washington, DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank, 2010).

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)

The Making of the SDGs

The post-2015 development agenda process (that would eventually produce Agenda 2030 and the SDGs), unlike the MDGs, was lengthy and included a “multitude of workstreams” involving member states (high-income countries and the least-developed countries alike), civil society, and the private sector. Spijkers and Honnibal summarize the complicated processes and opportunities for public participation that led to the development of Agenda 2030 in addition to stand-alone conferences and stock-taking events:

- Secretary-General led initiatives, including the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (HLP), the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (also known as SDSN and whose focus was the science and technology sector), and the UN Global Compact (also known as UNGC and whose focus was the private sector)
- “The intergovernmental Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG), which drafted proposed SDGs (mandated by Rio+20)”³⁵
- UN Development Program’s (UNDP) “The Global Conversation Begins” report, which “offers a snapshot of the current stories emerging from this global exercise in listening to people’s perspectives and priorities.”³⁶

The intergovernmental Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals began meeting in March 2013 and met monthly until June 2014.³⁷ In August 2014, the group published the “Open Working Group Proposal for the Sustainable Development Goals” and in September 2015 during the 70th Session of the UN General Assembly, member states adopted the agenda.³⁸ The resulting SDGs contained 17 goals instead of 8, and 169 targets instead of 18.³⁹ Agenda 2030 also had a much broader scope than the MDGs. Whereas the MDGs were focused on eradicating poverty, the SDGs were premised on a “triple bottom line,” a combination of economic development, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion.⁴⁰ The SDGs, for example, include goals on affordable and clean energy (MDG 7), climate action (MDG 13), and gender equality (MDG 5), in addition to goals to eradicate poverty and hunger (MDG 1 and 2).⁴¹ And where the MDGs sought to “halve poverty,” the SDGs sought to “end poverty.”⁴²

³⁵ Otto Spijkers and Arron Honnibal, “MDGs and SDGs: Lessons Learnt from Global Public Participation in the Drafting of the UN Development Goals,” *German Review on the United Nations* 62, no. 6 (2014), 7, accessed December 10, 2016, <http://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/306264>.

³⁶ Ibid; “The Global Conversation Begins: Emerging Views for a New Development Agenda,” UN Development Group, 2013, v, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/MDG/english/global-conversation-begins-web.pdf>.

³⁷ “Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals,” Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, accessed December 15, 2016, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/owg>.

³⁸ “Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015,” UN General Assembly, October 21, 2015 (A/RES/70/1), accessed December 15, 2016, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2FRES%2F70%2F1&Lang=E; “Open Working Group Proposal for the Sustainable Development Goals,” UN Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals, August 2014, Accessed December 15, 2016, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1579SDGs%20Proposal.pdf>.

³⁹ “Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015,” UN General Assembly, October 21, 2015, accessed December 15, 2016, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2FRES%2F70%2F1&Lang=E.

⁴⁰ Jeffrey D. Sachs, “From Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals,” *The Lancet* 379 (June 2012): 2206, accessed December 13, 2016.

⁴¹ “Sustainable Development Goals,” United Nations, accessed March 18, 2017, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>.

⁴² “Goals, Targets & Indicators,” UN Millennium Project, accessed December 11, 2016, <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/goals/gti.htm>; United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals: 2015 Progress Chart*, 2015, accessed December 10, 2016, http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20PC%20final.pdf; “Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015,” UN General Assembly, October 21, 2015, accessed December 15, 2016, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2FRES%2F70%2F1&Lang=E.

How the MDGs Informed the Formation of the SDGs

The most profound difference between the development of the MDGs and the SDGs was the level of civic engagement in the process. However, the MDGs (both their successes and failures) helped to inform the SDGs beyond increasing public participation in their formation. The international community attempted to reinstitute within the framework of the SDGs the three greatest strengths of the MDGs, namely that the MDGs were specific, quantitative, and time-bound. Again, the SDGs were limited to a relatively narrow set of goals, with measurable indicators. Again, the SDGs provided states a period of 15 years with which to achieve these measures. However, the number of goals doubled and the number of indicators increased nine-fold.

In response to accusations that the MDGs focused far too heavily on the developing countries without applying the same amount of pressure on wealthier states, the SDGs received a broader mandate.⁴³ The progress of the SDGs is measured in each country, not just in the developing world. In part, this is also because Agenda 2030 includes social development initiatives as well as economic (e.g. Goal 5 on gender equality) and includes indicators that require international cooperation (e.g. Goal 13 to combat climate change and Goal 14 to conserve and sustainably use the oceans).

Finally, to increase accountability, the UN created the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), to be convened annually under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and every four years under the auspices of the General Assembly.⁴⁴ During each HLPF session, states voluntarily participate in a review of national progress towards the 2030 Agenda and the HLPF reviews thematic progress on cross-cutting issues as well.

The SDGs' Prospects for Success

The UN demonstrated notable progress in the creation of the SDGs. The goals are now all inclusive in that they promote social development as well as economic, and require the same standards of progress for both wealthy and developing states. Civil society and public participation was incorporated into the creation process of the SDGs, and therefore the goals are more representative of all individuals instead of just those policy-makers from high-income countries. These improvements will likely prove to benefit the implementation of the SDGs. However, there are reasons to be cautious regarding the likelihood of success of the SDGs.

While it is a significant achievement that social development was included within the SDGs, the sheer number and extent of the goals included make the SDGs nearly impossible to realize. While the MDGs focused too specifically on eradicating poverty in the developing world, the SDGs include every possible lofty goal from reducing climate change (Goal 13) to ensuring sustainable consumption and production (Goal 12). Many regions, such as Sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania, struggled under the burden of 18 targets and now these same regions are expected to meet 169 targets. Much of the success of the SDGs, particularly in developing countries, will depend upon the ability of the international community to provide the necessary funding. Unfortunately, ODA is still increasing at a slow pace and only six states are fulfilling the 0.7 ODA target.⁴⁵

Additionally, much of the success of the MDGs is credited to extraordinary economic growth in China (growth that was well-established before the MDGs came into being). China's economic growth rate is the slowest it's been in 25 years, however, down from over 14 percent in

⁴³ Ashwani Saith, "From Universal Values to Millennium Development Goals: Lost in Translation," *Development and Change* 37, no. 6 (2006), accessed December 15, 2016, doi:10.1111/j.1467-7660.2006.00518.x.

⁴⁴ "High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)." Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform. Accessed April 11, 2017. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/majorgroups/hlpf>.

⁴⁵ "Development Aid Stable in 2014 but Flows to Poorest Countries Still Falling." OECD Development Assistance Committee, April 8, 2015. Accessed December 15, 2016. <https://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/documentupload/ODA%202014%20Technical%20Note.pdf>.

2007 to 6.9 percent in 2015.⁴⁶ Though this slowdown seemed inevitable after decades of unprecedented growth, if this decline continues (or, rather, if China fails to recover its previous economic growth rates), the SDGs will be much harder to achieve.

Finally, the ability to collect accurate data must be improved to adequately monitor progress towards the 2030 Agenda. Technology will certainly make data collection easier. However, the same challenges faced by the MDGs are likely to continue throughout the implementation of the SDGs. The vast majority of states will remain unable to provide the necessary statistics; states will continue to report on their own progress and will continue to have an incentive to inflate economic progress; and the UN will remain unable to collect and disseminate its own data to protect state sovereignty.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The SDGs improved upon the MDGs. The SDGs contained a broader scope that included social development alongside economic development. Civil society, the private sector, and developing states were able to provide inputs during the creation process, and an accountability mechanism (the HLPF) was created to encourage the realization of the 2030 Agenda. Despite these worthy efforts, the SDGs failed to address many of the MDGs' failings. The SDGs have incorporated far too many goals and targets, yet ODA is unlikely to increase at the rate necessary to meet these heightened expectations. The SDGs, unlike the MDGs, may have to rely far less on China's economic growth to achieve its mandate given China's current economic slowdown. Finally, the SDGs failed to address the current inadequacies of member states to measure progress towards international development goals. Because of these failings, it seems highly probable that the SDGs will be far less successful than their predecessor and will likely prove to be a disappointment to the international community at large.

⁴⁶ "GDP Growth (annual %)," The World Bank, China, accessed December 16, 2016, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=CN>; Mark Magnier, "China's Economic Growth in 2015 Is Slowest in 25 Years," The Wall Street Journal, January 19, 2016, accessed December 16, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/china-economic-growth-slows-to-6-9-on-year-in-2015-1453169398>.