

Is goal setting a good way to define global development agendas?



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THE IMPACTS AND METHODOLOGY OF INDICATORS AND
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JRC, ISPRA, ITALY

22-23 MARCH, 2018

THE NEW SCHOOL

Background: goals as a tool of global governance



Background: goal setting as method to define global development agenda is *new*



- Long history of goal setting from the 1960s.
- Goals set as part of broad sectoral agendas adopted at world conferences e.g. immunization goals at summit on children.
- Structure: nested goal/targets/indicators
- MDGs – first set of goals for ‘development’ as a whole
- SDGs – first use of goal setting *as a method for elaborating a global ‘development agenda’*

Background: SDGs



- International political agreement - elaborated through unprecedented process of multi-stakeholder consultations over 3 years
- Normative framework - sets standards for performance
- ‘Sustainable development’ - an agenda for progress towards more **inclusive** and **sustainable** society and economy (“leave no one behind”)
- More than a list of 17 goals, 169 targets and 232 indicators but a ‘package’
- Ambitious, transformative, integrated agenda
- Universal, not a N-S aid agenda
- Paradigm shift in development from the MDGs (development as ending poverty and N-S aid agenda)

MDG experience



COMMUNICATIONS TOOL

DISCURSIVE EFFECTS

KNOWLEDGE EFFECTS

GOVERNANCE (POLICY) EFFECTS

Misplaced faith in MDG “success” and the virtues of simplicity



“One of the **great successes** of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was that they were **brief**. They fit on the back of a business card – one that could be slipped as readily into a pocket of a US aid official as that of an Indian farmer.

If we stick with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) currently agreed, this is clearly not going to be the case after 2015. Even if you can remember all 17, there are still **too many** for civil society groups and other stakeholders to rally around all of them.”

Andrew Norton and Elizabeth Stuart, ODI

*'It's worth starting with one undoubted success of the MDGs: we are still talking about them twelve years later.....it is not hard to understand why: they were **simple, consensual, numerical and time bound** – truly a common, and commonly understood framework for development where success and failure was easy for even the mathematically challenged to follow.'*

Charles Kenny (Economist, CDG)

Rio Outcome Document calls for SDGs that are: 'action oriented, concise and **easy to communicate, limited in number**, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries, while taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities'

Simplicity or reductionism

Translating an agenda into an indicator



- “I think of the MDGs as the *Most Distracting Gimmicks* – a distraction from the much more important Beijing Platform for Action with its 12 Priority Areas of Concern, which represent a much closer approximation of the complexity of the relationship between gender equality and women’s empowerment (MDG3) and other MDGs and targets.” (Peggy Atrobus)
- “MDG3 was explicitly framed in terms of gender equality and women’s empowerment. Substantial portions of these had much potential not only for MDG3 but also to achieve other goals. Yet MDG3 was *whittled down to uncontroversial issues and disjointed targets and indicators*.” (Gita Sen and Avanti Mukherjee)

Beijing Agenda – education component

Table 4: World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995)*

Strategic Area of Concern	Strategic Objective	Quantitative Time-Bound Targets	Relevant MDG Goal/Target	Relevant Indicator
A. Women and Poverty	A1. Review, adopt and maintain macroeconomic policies and development strategies that address the needs and efforts of women in poverty.	N/A	N/A	N/A
	A2. Revise laws and administrative practices to ensure women's equal rights and access to economic resources.	N/A	N/A	N/A
	A3. Provide women with access to savings and credit mechanisms and institutions.	N/A	N/A	N/A
	A4. Develop gender-based methodologies and conduct research to address the feminization of poverty.	N/A	N/A	N/A
B. Education and Training of Women	B1. Ensure equal access to education.	By the year 2000, provide universal access to basic education and ensure completion of primary school education by at least 80 % of primary school-age children. Close the gender gap in primary and secondary school education by 2005, and provide universal primary education in all countries before the year 2015.	3A: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015	3.1 Ratios of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education
	B2. Eradicate illiteracy among women.	Provide universal access to, and seek to ensure gender equality in the completion of, primary education for girls by the year 2000.	2A: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling	2.3 Literacy rate of 15-24 year-olds, women and men
	B3. Improve women's access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education.	N/A	N/A	N/A
	B4. Develop non-discriminatory education and training.	N/A	N/A	N/A
	B5. Allocate sufficient resources for and monitor the implementation of educational reforms.	N/A	N/A	N/A
	B6. Promote life-long education and training for girls and women.	N/A	N/A	N/A

Women and Education:

MDGs picked up the quantitative targets of primary education and eradication of illiteracy.

MDGs do not mention:

1. Vocational training
2. Anti-discrimination
3. M&E of Education reforms
4. Life-long education

All of which were included in the Beijing agenda.

4 characteristics of goals, 4 effects



Characteristics

- **Simple** or simplification and reductionism
- **Measurable** or treasuring what we measure not measuring what we treasure
- **Concrete** or reification of intangible development objectives
- **Consensus** or non-transformative and conservative

Effects

- **Communication effects** - mobilize attention
- **Discursive effects** - create narratives and frame discourse
- **Knowledge effects** - distort meaning
- **Governance effects** - distort policy priorities

Social science literature on effects of quantification (Merry, Porter, Strathern...)



- **Power of numbers:**
 - Aura of scientific certitude, concreteness
- **Knowledge effects – redefining concepts:**
 - Simplifies complex concepts – ‘poverty’ to every child in school
 - Reifies intangible phenomena – gender equality to disparities in school enrollment
 - Abstracts contextually specific phenomena – universally applicable one size fits all goal for all countries
- **Governance effects – changing behaviour:**
 - Creates incentives for policy change by setting standards for performance that can put up for monitoring, reward and penalty
 - Target driven strategies
- **Goals effect behavior and thinking by:**
 - creating incentives by setting performance standards;
 - introducing a new narrative and discourse, redefining concepts



Case studies of 11 goals/targets

Income poverty: Greenstein, Gentilini and sumner

Hunger: Fukuda-Parr and Orr

Employment: van der Hoeven

Education: Unterhalter

Gender equality: Mukherjee and Sen (DAWN)

Child survival: Martinez and Gibbons

Maternal Health: Yamin and Boulanger

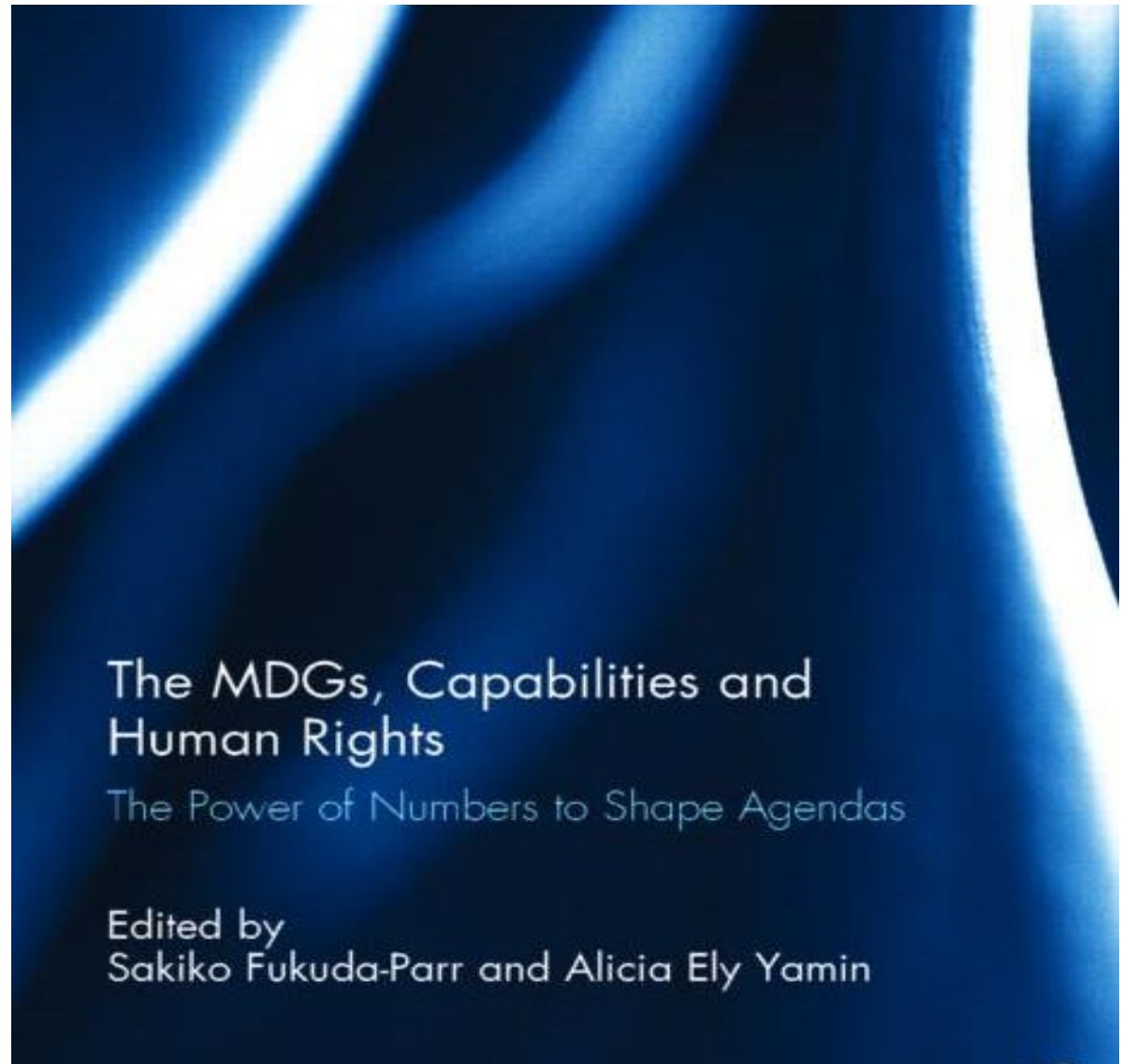
HIV/AIDS: Nattras

Water: Langford and Winkler

Cities: Cohen

Partnership: Caliri

Global Goals as a tool of Global Governance:
Fukuda-Parr



Findings – knowledge effects: examples – gender empowerment and maternal mortality.



- Reductionism: gender empowerment defined as parity in school enrollment. Sexual and reproductive health and rights framed as maternal mortality.
 - Reframing development as delivering measuring results, not transformative change.
- “No empowerment without rights” – empowerment involves change in unequal power relations requiring transformation of power structures in society and women’s own capacity and agency.

Findings – distorting policy priorities



Policy effects:

- diverting attention from important objectives and challenges, redefining agendas: *‘spotlight’ on maternal mortality*, *reproductive health and rights ‘in the shadow’*
- Funding priority on narrow technocratic agenda and neglect of non-health sector programs e.g. comprehensive sexuality education. Decline in funding for women’s organizations. Inadequate disaggregation.

Example: hunger - Knowledge effects



- 1990s: food insecurity/hunger as a problem of access due to broad range of structural constraints (income, production, social transfer, development environment)
- MDG target driven concept: Concept of well being: commodity based/basic needs framing in place of capabilities and rights.
- Excludes: processes, relations, power structures, inter-relatedness of poverty dimensions.
- Creates narrative of food security as a problem of supply – ‘can we feed the world’ – that justifies investment/technology led investments as a solution.

Policy effect – back to target driven supply oriented strategies

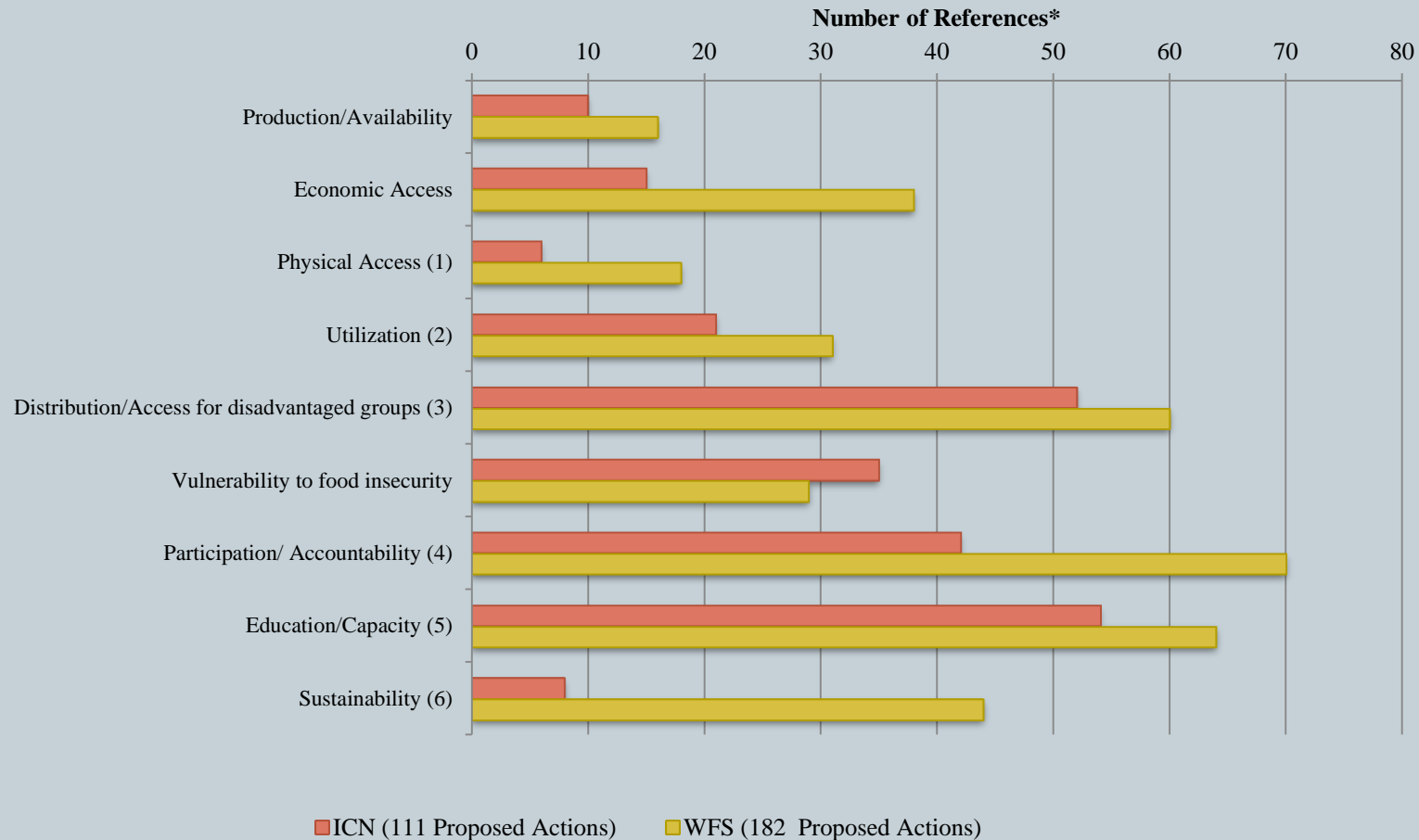


- **Millennium Project Task Force on Hunger**
 - 1990s failure to make real progress
 - Focus on delivery and prioritize actions that promise tangible outcomes or ‘results orientation’.
 - No mention of disadvantaged groups, vulnerability, participation, accountability.
- **Scale Up Nutrition (SUN) – 13 nutrition specific interventions**
- **Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA)**
- **Global Alliance for Improved and Nutrition (GAIN)**
- **Gates Foundation funding agriculture and nutrition**
- **New Alliance for food security and nutrition**
- **UN High Level Task Force (2008) Comprehensive Framework for Action**
- **Reformed Committee on Food Security – inclusion of Civil Society, Private Sector, Foundations, IFIs, UN agencies, Governments**

New trends:

- results orientation, private public partnerships, environmentally sustainable agriculture, private investments and technology (new varieties; fortified foods) as solutions, focus on nutrition/health
- Push back from civil society, food sovereignty movements
- Competing visions and strategies on agriculture, on nutrition, political dynamics in emerging global governance arrangements

ICN (1992) & WFS (1996) – broad strategies



Source: WFS and ICN Plans of Action, Authors Review

* Many proposed actions addressed multiple human rights/human development categories. As a result, the total number of references exceeds the number of proposed actions in each plan of action.

Findings – poor choice of indicators



- lacking evidence base as planning targets (e.g. slums)
- inconsistent with international human rights standards (e.g. education)
- mis-aligned with development priorities (e.g. climate change, telephones)
- impossible to disaggregate (e.g. poverty, hunger)
- potential for creating perverse incentives (e.g. underweight for height)
- ‘treasure what we measure’ or ‘measure what we treasure’

SDGs



KNOWLEDGE AND POLITICS IN SETTING AND MEASURING SDGS

SDGs formulation – ‘slippage’ in formulation



- Goals reinterpreted in targets and indicators
- Incomplete
- Different meaning
- Slow pace of developing Tier III indicators

Reducing ambition of the transformative agenda,
reducing transformative power.

Examples



- Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and between countries
- 10 targets. No target on reducing unequal distribution of income or wealth (e.g. Palma index or gini coefficient).
- Target 10.1: By 2030 progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40% of the population at rate higher than the national average
- Focus on the bottom of distribution, keeps out issue of extreme inequality and concentration of wealth/power.
- Why? controversies over stand alone goal: protagonists – US/UK, Nordics, Latin American countries, Stiglitz, Gates, Oxfam.....

examples: 14 – conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas and marine resources



- target 14.6 By 2030 prohibit certain forms of fisheries *subsidies* which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing...
- Indicator 14.6.1 Progress by countries in the degree of implementation of international instruments aiming to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing

Concluding reflections



Targets exert influence



- set standards of performance
- redefine concepts
- create narratives
- frame discourses and agendas

Global goals as tool to set agendas



- MDGs introduced as monitoring benchmarks, and transformed into an agenda and a planned/management targets
- Intended use of global goals
 - Communications tool
 - Benchmarks for monitoring progress (data/indicators as evidence for policy making)
- Use for setting agendas (political use of indicators)
 - Risks of simplification and distortion of knowledge
 - Politics of control over agenda through framing debate

Indicators: technocratic or political tool?



- Power of indicators to redefine targets and goals
- Goal setting is to control discourse and framing of policy priorities
- Intense contestation over goals, targets and indicators, competition for control of discourse
- Indicators are not neutral but are deeply political

Is 'sensible' use of indicators possible?

Framing development



"The exercise of framing is composed of two parts: one, drawing attention to a specific issue (such as the environment or urban unemployment); two, determining how such an issue is viewed. A successful framing exercise will both cause an issue to be seen by those that matter, and ensure that they see it in a specific way. And this is achieved with the minimum of conflict or pressure... An effective 'frame' is one which makes favored ideas seem like common sense, and unfavored ideas as unthinkable. as Cox (1992:179) argues, 'hegemony frames thought and thereby circumscribes action'."

Boas and McNeill, Framing the World (2004)