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MDGs That Nudge

The Millennium Development Goals, Popular Mobilization, and the Post-2015 Development Framework

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Abstract

The Millennium Development Goals, which expire in 2015, were a global agreement to promote human development and reduce poverty. But they did not create a legalized institutional regime, in which precise obligations would be delegated to specific actors, nor were they, in many respects, compatible with the incentives of the countries whose heads of state endorsed them. They most resembled international human rights treaties, which are also not legally coercive, and which achieve their effects largely through their role in social and political mobilization. But unlike human rights treaties, the Millennium Development Goals' targets and goals were not psychologically, morally, and politically salient. The goals and targets for the proposed second round of Millennium Development Goals should be easier to grasp and embed within them a causal narrative about the causes and remedies of global poverty. Their formulation and implementation should also draw on national institutions and processes, which most people find more persuasive than discussions at the international level. The paper develops these ideas and presents examples for how post-2015 development goals and targets might be presented in ways that are more compelling.

MDGs That Nudge:
The Millennium Development Goals, Popular Mobilization, and the Post-2015 Development Framework[*]

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The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a United Nations-endorsed list of targets for global achievement on poverty and development, face their final deadline in 2015. It appears that at least one goal – halving the share of people in the world who live in extreme poverty, relative to 1990 – has already been surpassed. The achievement of this goal, however, is largely the result of China's enormous progress on poverty reduction; without China's progress, the global target would not have been met. Other goals, such as reducing child mortality by two-thirds and maternal mortality by three-fourths, relative to 1990 levels, and achieving universal primary education, appear, for the developing world as a whole, out of reach. Some countries and regions, notably East Asia and Latin America, will surpass more of the global targets than other countries and regions, notably Sub-Saharan Africa. Overall, the MDGs' verdict on the world's development progress, come 2015, is certain to be mixed.[1]

What should be done after the goals expire? Options on the table for a post-2015 development framework (let's call is "MDGs 2.0") include proposals to supplement the MDG targets with the pressing issue areas that have emerged since 2000, including environmental sustainability (German Watch, 2010), human rights (Nelson, 2007), equity (Fukuda-Parr, 2010; Vandemoortele, 2011), and governance (Carin & Bates-Eamer, 2012). Other ideas include the development of a post-2015 framework in a process that is more open and participatory than the "insider" game that led to the MDGs (World Vision International, 2011). Others have proposed moving beyond the specific indicators approach to a shared vision of development (Waage et al., 2010), or adopting a framework that emphasizes the obligations of rich countries to restructure the global economic architecture (Pogge, 2012). The predecessor model for development frameworks, which emphasized decade-long themes rather than measurable indicators, also remains available. The UN is planning a number of high-level meetings on the subject.

It is striking that most discussions of MDG successors focus on the content of potential goals, rather than their framing or form. This is a problem because the MDGs were not only a declaration about

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[1] Verbeek (2012: 3) notes that, as of October, 2012, that less than three of the 21 targets of the eight MDGs had been achieved, and that global progress towards the remaining targets "has been less than stellar, particularly the MDGs related to education and health."

what development ought to be (ultimately, they suggested, development is about human well-being and capabilities), but also an incentive scheme for getting there. To the extent that MDGs 2.0 will also set goals or declare priorities, they, too, will constitute an incentive scheme for governments, donors, civil society actors, and others. Because the form that incentives take strongly affects the prospects for successful collective action, a discussion of the form of MDGs 2.0 is indispensable.

The incentive scheme envisaged in the original MDGs relied on good intentions, inter-agency coordination, and cajoling from donors, rather than on explicit extrinsic incentives. No organizations were named responsible for implementation, and there were no consequences for failure (or success) in achieving targets. Rather, donor agencies worked with governments to develop strategic plans, to monitor progress, and publish status reports, on the understanding that publicity and social norms might motivate the various actors responsible for development progress (citizens, civil society organizations, central governments, local governments, donor countries, and others).

This is another way of stating that the incentives tied to the MDG scheme were very low-powered. That may not be surprising, given that low-powered incentive schemes are common in development accords, and there is every reason to think that the incentive scheme associated with MDGs 2.0 will also be low-powered. But not all low-powered incentives in the international sphere have the same effects. Some ways of stating goals and objectives resonate more with people, and generate more popular mobilization, than others. In particular, those that are normatively and cognitively salient have a greater chance of generating popular mobilization and support. The post-2015 development framework, whatever the content of the goals, should be stated in a form that can speak to people and generate support for development objectives.

This paper makes that argument in three steps. First, it argues the MDGs were a weakly legalized agreement, and that the same is likely to be true for MDGs 2.0. Second, it argues that popular mobilization, both internationally and nationally, is crucial for the impact of international human rights

agreements, which the MDGs loosely resemble. Third, it argues that a more psychologically, morally, and politically salient development framework would better promote political mobilization, and provides illustrative examples for how to increase salience.

What were the MDGs?

It may be easier to state what the Millennium Development Goals were not than to characterize what they were. From the perspective of international law, the Declaration that emerged from the Millennium Summit was neither a treaty nor a binding international instrument. Although the Millennium Declaration was a Resolution adopted by heads of state gathered for the UN General Assembly, there was no reference in the Declaration to a ratification process, which accompanies treaties, nor was the document officially listed in the UN Treaty Database. Although parliamentary involvement in the MDG process did take place in a few countries (for instance, in 2005 the Parliament of Mongolia passed a resolution on the MDGs that established a ninth goal on human rights and democratic governance), these did not amount to a formal assumption of internationally recognized obligations.[2] Over the years, through national declarations, the MDGs may arguably have contributed to evolving norms in international customary law (Alston, 2005), but that, if true, is the exception that proves the rule: the MDGs constituted a weak form of legalization.

The hallmarks of a legalized international regime are obligation, precise, and delegation (Abbott, Keohane, Moravcsik, Slaughter, & Snidal, 2000). The "hardest" forms of legalization occur when formal procedures (such as accession to an agreement, the possibility of reservations, provisions for withdrawal) are used to establish obligations, when there are mechanisms for monitoring compliance and penalizing failure to comply, when specific and authoritative organizations are tasked with these compliance monitoring and sanctioning functions, and when the rules that underlie the obligations are precise and

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[2] Manning (2010) notes that at least ten countries added new goals or modified those of the MDGs. Albania, Iraq, and Mongolia added goals on good governance and/or fighting corruption; Armenia, Cambodia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan modified goal 2 to include providing eight or nine years of education to all children; and Colombia and Mongolia added relevant national infectious diseases to goal 6. Another 15 countries added or modified targets, and 25 more added or modified indicators.

internally coherent. The MDGs did not exhibit these characteristics. As mentioned, there were no assumption of formal obligations, nor a set of organizations tasked with interpretation, monitoring, and sanctioning. (The World Bank, the UN, NGOs, and some state governments did monitor, but sanctions amounted to little more than lamentation; and in many cases the entities that did the monitoring were identical with the entities held responsible for success or failure). The rules for assessing obligations, moreover, were ambiguous despite the existence of numerical targets. That is because the targets were global in scope, but the responsible implementing entities only had control over national territories (if that). It has remained unclear if the MDGs were intended as average targets for each country or a minimal target that each country was under pressure to achieve. And significantly, there was a growing awareness that achievement of the targets was often hindered by circumstances beyond the control of national governments, that the marginal costs of progress depended in part on the baseline level of achievement (which obviously varied by country), that there was a mismatch for some goals between the overall objective and the measurable targets, and that the targets for MDG 8 on global cooperation were (uniquely among the goals) not quantified – all these contributed to confusion regarding the clarity and precision of the targets associated with the MDGs.

There is, moreover, little reason to believe the post-2015 development agenda will be much different. In the international sphere, a simple analysis of state motivations would argue that the likelihood that states will establish legalized obligations, as well as associated monitoring institutions, in a given policy domain, increases primarily with the net benefits associated with action in that policy domain, and secondarily with the expected propensity of states to shirk from their contributions, which raises the value of monitoring (e.g., Jojarth, 2009). In the domain of development assistance and global poverty reduction, the propensity to shirk, on the part of both donors and as well as many recipient countries, is indeed high, a circumstance that increases the value of legalization; but, on the other hand, the net benefits associated with global poverty reduction in other countries are, for most states, very low. The median voter in most polities does not worry enough about global poverty to support taxes (or other

sacrifices) to finance measures to eradicate it. More bluntly, most states do not care all that much about global poverty reduction. Other objectives, such as external security, domestic law and order, economic growth, domestic equity, and identity recognition, are typically much more important.

This line of reasoning suggests that low levels of legalization for development agreements are likely to continue. MDGs 2.0 will in all probability resemble the original MDGs in the extent to which they fail to specify obligations, delegate authority to organizations tasked with interpreting, monitoring, and sanctioning non-compliance, and delineate clear rules of action. A more robust system of global accountability for development outcomes remains, then, a distant goal.

Political mobilization

The international human rights declarations and covenants, like the Millennium Declaration and the associated Millennium Development Goals, are highly aspirational and normative. Also like the MDGs, they exhibit a low level of legalization. It is true that the human rights instruments are constructed on the basis of formal legal procedures (i.e., they require ratification or accession, and permit reservations and withdrawals), but the obligations associated with them are under-specified (compared, for instance, to the very precise articles in a treaty such as the Convention on International Civil Aviation); multiple entities monitor compliance, none of which is authoritative, often resulting in conflicting characterizations of the behavior of duty bearers (organizations who monitor include international human rights NGOs, domestic NGOs, domestic courts, domestic human rights commissions and ombudsmen, UN entities such as the OHCHR, and the UN committees tasked with monitoring); and the rules governing action are sometime ambiguous and internally conflicting (consider the tension between property rights and the fulfillment of certain social and economic rights).[3]

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[3] I do not mean to suggest that human rights cannot be legalized. Indeed, they certainly are in many domestic (Gauri & Brinks, 2008) and regional (Staton & Romero, 2011) settings. Rather, the point here is that the international human rights regimes currently do not exhibit a high level of legalization.

For the MDGs, the instructive point of this analogy is that the international human rights architecture affects the behavior of states, reorders the objectives of civil society organizations, uplifts the self-understanding of individuals, and has demonstrable effects on measurable indicators of human freedoms *despite* a low level of legalization. The effects are not necessarily high in magnitude, but they are real (Simmons, 2009). How does this process work? Sometimes human rights norms and covenants justify the implementation of coercive measures, such as economic sanctions; but more often they mobilize domestic NGOs and transnational movements (Keck & Sikkink, 1998), empower bureaucratic and political entrepreneurs who formulate implement new policies (Gauri, 2011), and guide judges to develop new constitutional interpretations (Langford, 2009). Over the long run, the language of international human rights treaties has found its way into the language of new national constitutions, and has inspired new social movements on behalf of lower castes in India, victims of military dictatorship in Argentina, people living with HIV/AIDS worldwide, ethnic minorities in the US and Europe, persons with disabilities, women in traditional societies, and genocide victims in the Great Lakes region of Africa, among many others.

From what sources do the international human rights treaties draw their mobilizing power? The ultimate sources are difficult to articulate, but there is little doubt that centuries of constitutional revolution (Habermas, 2010), social upheaval (Thompson, 1963), professional and educational attainment (Mukherjee, 2010), political writing (Alston & Goodman, 2007), religious reformation (Taylor, 1989), ethical argument (Pogge, 2002), and artistic and literary achievement (Hunt, 2007) regarding freedom, dignity, individuality, and rights have left their mark. Against that backdrop, the history of human rights "monitoring" (or "recognition") on issues such as torture, human rights violation, genocide, repression, survival, and religious liberty, through circumstances as culturally and historically significant as the concentration camps before and during the second world war, genocides in Armenia, Rwanda, and elsewhere, dissidents in Eastern Europe, and famines in Russia, China, Ethiopia and Bangladesh, have created a backdrop against which every present-day human rights monitoring report is understood.

By contrast, the MDGs employ technocratic targets, with little of the moral resonance of terms like "torture" or "dissidents." At the same time, they involve complicated measures, employing terms such as "infant mortality rate" and "halve the proportion" and "gender disparity," that are cognitively challenging. This combination of rhetorical weakness and cognitive demandingness jointly undermines their potential mobilizing power. It may be true that some of the larger MDG goals are broadly appealing (e.g., maternal and child health), but even these do not draw on global memory in the way that terms like "freedom" and "rights" do. This is problematic because one of the principal pathways through which international instruments drive change is through changing "global norms" (Green, Hale, & Lockwood, 2012).

If the argument above is correct – if in a weakly legalized international policy domain, social and political mobilization on the basis of resonant values is the principal pathway of change – then it may not be surprising that the more ambitious MDG targets were not met, and that, for those that were achieved, that it is not obvious whether the MDGs were responsible. For instance, Fukuda-Parr and Greenstein (2010) find that for most countries with available data, progress on all of the MDG targets (but for the income target) was no faster from the midpoint of the MDG era to the latest available data point than it had been beforehand. Kenny and Sumner (2011: 24), who use a quadratic specification on a subsample of countries and find that the MDG-era may have increased the speed of improvement for education targets (but not health targets) in the majority of countries, nevertheless conclude that, "the weak available evidence suggests that [the MDGs] have had only a limited impact on policies in developing countries and on the course of global broad-based poverty reduction. Given their evolution as DAC Development Goals (albeit from UN agreements of the 1990s) and lack of legal authority, perhaps such a conclusion should come as little surprise."

On the other hand, the MDGs do indeed appear to have changed the way that development actors talk about development, and possibly how they allocate resources. The MDGs were mentioned in several Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (Fukuda Parr 2010). The MDGs, and their use in "Make Poverty

History" other related campaigns and initiatives, have been partly responsible for the nearly 50% increase in development assistance from donor countries to developing countries from 2000-2011, for the increasing share of that aid what went to low income (rather than middle income) countries, and for the larger share going to the social sectors (Kenny and Sumner 2011). The MDGs may also have played an important role in producing more and better data in many countries (Boerma & Stansfield, 2007).

In other words, the MDGs did spur international mobilization, even though the promises of the Millennium Declaration were not kept. Some have interpreted this as a failure, and have lamented that the MDG products were "all talk." But while the long-term goal of development targets should indeed be the enhancement of human wellbeing and freedoms, I want to argue that in the short- to medium-term more talk is a feature, not a bug. The *only* thing the MDGs can really do is to mobilize. To recognize that is to focus much less on the relative merit of different development objectives, the precision and measurability of various indicators, and the development models underlying proposed goals, and much more on how to increase the mobilizing power of the new development framework.

Nudging

There are at least three ways to increase the salience of development targets. First, the targets could become less cognitively demanding. Second, the goals could be more compelling morally. Third, the selection of targets could utilize more normatively and politically legitimate processes. Although this section sketches ideas along all three of these dimensions, the indicators below are only suggestive. Collective and global brainstorming along these lines would likely produce a better set of ideas. This section is meant only to illustrate some approaches for developing MDGs that capture people's attention and imagination – MDGs that, using the term loosely, "nudge" (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008).

Psychological salience

Kahneman (2011), reviewing the psychological evidence, argues that cognitively easy facts and data are associated with a feeling of familiarity, and that familiarity creates the ring of truth (even when

careful scrutiny would show otherwise). Believing that a fact is true is not identical to believing that a target is worthwhile, but in the case of development goals the two are probably related. People who cannot understand a target are unlikely to support it with enthusiasm. Perhaps one of the most infamous findings on salience in the development literature is the result that people in donor countries significantly overestimate the amount of money their governments commit to overseas development assistance, and when asked what the right amount should be, suggest a number that is much higher than current assistance levels.[4] But this finding is not only, and perhaps not primarily, a reflection of cynical views regarding government or stinginess toward outsiders; rather, similar problems arise in a variety of questions involving policy issues, budgets, and large numbers (Kuklinski, Quirk, Jerit, Schwieder, & Rich, 2003). Larger numbers are hard to grasp. Discussing millions and billions of dollars is not an everyday matter. The same is true of complex measures, such as ratios and technical terms.

This line of consideration suggests that development targets designed to nudge should avoid using large numbers, proportions, and technical terms wherever possible. If there is to be a target for official development assistance, for instance, the "standard" target of 0.7% of GNI, which has the disadvantage of including both a percent and technical term, should be replaced. A more salient number would be dollars of development assistance per person, from each donor country, which intuitively informs people how much of their tax money is going to development assistance, and allows them to compare that contribution to how much they spend on their own purchases. Consider, for instance, how much easier it would be to imagine the impact of a decline in ODA if it were expressed, not as a reduction from 0.5% to 0.27% of GNI, but as a contribution of, say, USD$218 person falling to $132 per person (roughly the decline in Austria from 2007 to 2011). Of course, ODA per person does not measure the same quantity as share of GNI; it would shift benchmarks of donor generosity to the benefit of richer countries. Still, the percentage of GNI target, while more "fair" from a certain point of view, does not

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[4] The finding has been replicated several times. See, for instance, the World Public Opinion survey of 2010: http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brunitedstatescanadara/670.php?nid=&id=&pnt=670&lb=. See also this 2012 survey of American public opinion from the Kaiser Family Foundation: http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/upload/8304.pdf.

appear to be motivating many countries and voters to contribute more (given that some of the richest

OECD donors do not contribute the most, as measured by share of GDP).[5] Moving to the more nudging

indicator may well be worth the loss in precision.

A similar argument might be made for carbon dioxide emissions, which while not an MDG

target, has been suggested as a target for MDGs 2.0. Thousand metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent

emissions, per capita or per dollar of national GDP, is a difficult-to-grasp indicator. Even measures of

global average temperature may not be intuitive – an increase of two degrees centigrade in the average

temperature of the world does not seem like much to the untrained ear. Rather, the contributions of an

average person in a country to the rise in sea levels, in millimeters, over a defined time period, would be a

more palpable target. That indicator can be visualized. It also embeds within it the causal narrative

between carbon emissions and some of its potentially catastrophic consequences. It is true that estimating

current and future sea levels as a function of carbon emissions is an ongoing area of research, and the

estimates would invariably have a confidence interval around them. But again, if the goal is nudging, and

if the confidence intervals are not too large, this would be an acceptable cost for a motivational device.

For fair trade, which is another element of the "global partnership for development" (MDG 8), an

indicator might be the total cost of each country's tariff and non-tariff barriers on the income of the

poorest countries. This could be easily comparable among rich countries, and the numerical benchmark of

zero – no tariffs and non-tariff barriers on the poorest countries – is easily understood. It is also consistent

with the readily grasped "do no harm" principle (more on that below).

The health targets in the MDGs were to reduce by two-thirds the under-five mortality rate and by

three quarters in the maternal mortality ratio. These are complex indicators, and the numerical quantities

associated with good outcomes on these measures, are, for most people, not intuitive. For instance, it is

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[5] The share of GNI target may well have played a role in motivating an increase in ODA in some countries, such as
the Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom, and Ireland, in the period from 2000 to 2011. But it is not clear, yet, whether
public support for increases in ODA has consolidated. For instance, Hudson and VanHeerde-Hudson (2012) find
that OECD public support for development aid, as measured by Eurobarometer surveys, rapidly fell back to 1990s
levels after peaking in run up to the 2005 Gleneagles Summit.

not evident to most people whether a decline in under-five mortality from 200 deaths per 1,000 live births to 180 per 1,000 is a more significant achievement than a decline from 30 to 10. A more numerically salient target would be life expectancy. People generally have a sense of how long the average life is in their country, and also how long it might be in the richer countries. The target could be a "normal lifespan" (which sounds less technical than life expectancy). Because life expectancy is typically calculated as life expectancy at birth, and is very sensitive to reductions in mortality in the early years of life, life span might be calculated as life expectancy of all citizens currently living in a country, or in some other way weight lifespan information from older individuals as much as (or almost as much as) young children.

In education, several have proposed a target that focuses on outcomes, not just school attendance. Perhaps the most salient psychological target would be "universal literacy." The ability to read and write is easily understood. And universality, 100%, is obviously a salient number.

A second characteristic of psychological salience involves causal narrative. When confronted with confusing or even meaningless information, human beings nevertheless search for a storyline; and in the absence of an available causal explanation, they invent one (Kahneman 2011). The MDGs entailed no explicit or implicit storyline for either why many people and countries are poor, or how the obstacles to shared prosperity might be overcome. To some extent this was by design, on the view that countries should be free to use a local approach, based on a contextual model of the development process and the local "binding constraints," to achieve the targets. But if the primary effect of the MDGs is about nudging, the importance of narrative needs to be taken seriously.

There are many possibilities for a narrative about development, but one part of the storyline may be crucial. Most people, when asked to consider why people are poor and why efforts to promote development have had mixed success, find themselves thinking about the widespread use of patronage to distribute resources and opportunities, the creation of "dependency" on the part of recipients of ODA and

government resources more generally, and the use of state institutions to extract money from people rather than to deliver services. The shorthand for all this is something like "corruption." Darnton and Kirk (2011: 92), in a study of "frames" to engage the public on global poverty, note that "corruption is the only aspect of global poverty that all segments of the public are keen to talk about." When the MDGs fail to mobilize people, both in the rich donor countries and in developing countries, there is little doubt that many think that ODA and government programs have foundered *because* of corruption. A causal narrative that avoids this issue may fail to engage; conversely, a direct approach to the problem may bring people on board, as a "halo effect" from the framing of development as overcoming corruption infuses the larger development project. Darnton and Kirk suggest avoiding the term "corruption" itself because it may trigger frames associated with individualism rather than with community and generosity. That may be. But it is a difficult to subject to avoid altogether if the goal of the development agenda is political mobilization. Perhaps alternative framings and language could be used. One idea would be to develop widely accepted benchmarks of "transparency" and to score countries on the extent to which their institutions follow these transparency procedures. Rich countries might also be scored on whether they have adopted policies that reduce the incentives of their own citizens and corporations to engage in activities that promote corruption in developing countries.

Moral salience

Consider Appiah's (2010) "moral revolutions": the end of the duel in Europe, the banning of foot binding in China, and the suppression of Atlantic slavery. All of them concerned the ending of a widespread social practice. Colonization was a more complex phenomenon, but decolonization movements too could be understood as ethical arguments to stop the practice of controlling and monopolizing the governments and economies of other countries (Crawford, 2002). Gandhi, who pioneered India's non-cooperation movement, which in turn laid the groundwork for many contemporary efforts on behalf of civil rights for racial and ethnic minorities, understood the moral power of refusal: "Rejection is as much of an ideal as the acceptance of a thing. It is as necessary to reject untruth as it is to

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accept truth . . . we had lost the power of saying no" (quoted in Mukherjee 2011: 179). It seems that many of history's most memorable moral campaigns were demands to powerful actors that they stop doing something.

Moral psychologists have established that people respond more viscerally to personal involvement and proximity involving a moral wrong than to utilitarian calculations (Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, & Cohen, 2001). That may be one reason that a demand that people stop doing something resonates; it's personal. Pogge (1998) argues that although negative duties take precedence over positive duties, citizens in rich countries are indeed actively harming the developing country poor by erecting and sustaining unfair global rules on trade, intellectual property, and resource extraction that leave many of the latter destitute. Without necessarily arguing that morality itself requires more exigent standards for avoiding harm than for doing good, here I want to emphasize that demands to stop harm are particularly salient.

The framing of the *goals* for MDGs 2.0 could utilize this insight. This may be particularly effective for elements of the agenda that involve the "development partnership" and global rules, as Pogge emphasizes. Goals for the trade regime and international financial sector regulation, for instance, might be stated as "Avoid policies that expose the poorest people in the world to further risks." A goal on climate change and sustainability could be framed as "Stop exposing the world's most vulnerable to more droughts, floods, and storms." A frame that uses harm avoidance also embeds within it a causal narrative.

It may also be possible to frame the other, more nationally oriented goals in this manner, as well. A goal on corruption and transparency, for example, could be "Release all information that helps people make economic and political choices for themselves." That emphasizes that governments that hoard information are infringing on freedoms. A goal on urban slum dwellers could include something like: "Respect housing rights and treat informal settlers fairly." That phrasing might make clear that not recognizing informal land titles may constitute an active harm that many governments engage in. Finally,

a goal on poverty and social exclusion might be "Prevent the monopolization of social and economic opportunities." That formula emphasizes that inequalities arise when public and private actors limit access to the educational, political, legal, and social pathways to prosperity. The language of some these broad goals might, as indicated, draw on the mobilizing power of concepts such as rights, liberties, and equality.

Political salience

In a recent speech, World Bank President Jim Kim said, "The [MDGs] gave a tangible burst of energy to our development efforts, attracting great attention from both governments and publics, and that energy translated into greater resource flows. But we could have done better if solutions at the country level would have been linked to implementation strategies right from the start" ("Post-2015 Global Development Framework," World Bank-IMF General Meetings, Tokyo, October 12, 2012).

International civil servants designed the MDGs on the basis of the Millennium Declaration, which, though approved by heads of state, had not received the endorsement of legislatures, courts, or civil society in most countries. Then, in the implementation phase, the MDGs were generally not translated into concrete action plans to guide policy and resource allocation at the national or sub-national levels. Indeed, many have argued that the MDG targets were very much a "one-size fits all" approach and therefore could not be used in country-level planning. For the purposes of this article, what is central is that the process of MDG articulation and monitoring failed to draw on the legitimacy of states and governments.

From the point of view of political mobilization, that is problematic because two of the most important extrinsic reasons why some ethical arguments are accepted and others are not are that a) some arguments are aired in forums where they can be heard whereas others are presented in marginal venues;

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and b) some arguments are echoed and endorsed by authoritative voices while others only enjoy the support of outsiders or mavericks (Crawford 2004). States and national governments control access to the deliberative forums in which national development agendas are articulated; states and national governments also enjoy more prestige, authority, and legitimacy than international civil servants. In other words, states control political salience.

Certain development goals, such as educational attainment and social exclusion, are, in the first approximation, the outcome of national policies. For these, MDGs 2.0 could state that each country's government is responsible for formulating, deliberating about, and implementing national targets. Some countries might wish to draw on, or request, the advice of the international development community; but in many countries such requests could jeopardize the perceived national "ownership" of the development targets. (The development goals that involve the global agenda, such as those currently included in MDG 8, would be formulated at the international level). These "national MDGs 2.0" might be more circumspect, in some cases, than what the international community might have endorsed. But from the point of view of political mobilization, gains in political salience from this approach would likely exceed the losses from little ambition. National processes in the formulation, deliberation, adoption, and implementation of MDGs 2.0 might create important focal points for social and political mobilization. Accountability for development outcomes still arises almost entirely from domestic mobilization, and national MDG targets might play a role in generating it.[6]

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[6] It is worth noting that the formulation of the post-2015 agenda is shaping up to be much more participatory and consultative than the process that led to the MDGs. There are expected to be 70-100 national consultations, open meetings involving international and interdisciplinary perspectives, spaces for online input from ordinary people, a global survey of poor people, and inter-governmental working groups on the Sustainable Development Goals ("The Post-2015 Development Agenda," UNDESA presentation, Democratic Governance and Human Rights: Criteria and measurement proposals for a post-2015 development agenda OHCHR/UNDP Expert Consultation, 13-14 November 2012, New York). But these processes are somewhat distinct from the point being made here, which is that national political institutions (legislatures, courts etc) control political salience, and that the processes for the formulation of MDGs 2.0, although participatory in many important respects, have not given a central place to those institutions.

What if some countries failed to adopt national development targets? For that scenario, it may be useful to structure the "choice architecture" (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008) so that there is a default condition. The international community could present default targets (suitably tailored to various regions or kinds of countries) that would be used to benchmark progress in those countries that failed to adopt their own. The use of international rather than national targets might well be understood as a (mild) infringement of sovereignty in some countries, and might motivate the adoption of a national framework and national (and even sub-national) targets. And the simple process of monitoring whether or not countries have even adopted a national agenda could bring social pressure to bear. Adopting national targets and indicators might itself be indicative of the seriousness of national engagement. To some extent, this idea resembles the "Comprehensive Development Framework" and the "Poverty Reduction Strategy Processes" of the 1990s and the early 2000s, which were not, it must be said, politically salient in most countries. An important difference, in this case, would be that the formulation of national development plans would be a duty of all countries, rich and poor alike, and not merely an exercise necessary for debt relief or development assistance – a quid pro quo whose value is primarily instrumental.

Conclusion

A degree of self-preoccupation, a restricted range of sympathies, and the preference for one's own group appear to be part of human nature, and have constrained the world's effort to respond to global poverty. Still, the mobilizing power of the development agenda has also suffered from a technocratic framing, the refusal to draw on moral history, and perceived political illegitimacy. Unlike the first set of issues, the latter set of problems is partly correctable.

Future MDGs could usefully try to do just that. The targets for MDGs 2.0 should be easy to grasp and embed within them a causal narrative about the causes and remedies of global poverty. The goals for MDGs 2.0 could usefully be framed as harm avoidance so as to draw on one of the main attributes of morally salient problems. And if the processes for the formulation and adoption of MDGs 2.0 draw more

on the authority of national governments than on the expertise of international actors, they would lend themselves more readily to political mobilization, which should be understood to be the central goal of the post-2015 development agenda.

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