Nathan Andrews
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Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Retrospect

Africa's Development Beyond 2015

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Preface

In September 2000, the United Nations met to deliberate on its pivotal role as the world propels into the twenty-first century. The major outcome of this UN Summit was the ratification of the UN Millennium Declaration which reiterated the observance of the International Human Rights and Humanitarian law according to the principles of the UN Charter as well as the Treaties of Sustainable Development. Following this Declaration, the UN came up with eight millennium development goals (MDGs) set out as targets which the international community must commit to achieving by 2015. Endorsed by 198 United Nations Member States and over 20 international organizations including the World Bank, World Health Organization, and International Monetary Fund, the MDGs were outlined to address the following eight goals: extreme poverty and hunger; universal primary education; gender equality and empowering women; child mortality; maternal health; HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; environmental sustainability; and global partnership for development.

Since their inception in 2000, the MDGs have attracted numerous debates and controversies. This volume is an important contribution to the debates. It reflects the trend in the field—a growing concern regarding MDGs as achievement targets and the various ways they are being evaluated, in particular (Easterly 2007). Over the past decade, debates on MDGs have rested both on what has been achieved as well as on the slow progress of reaching the targets (Birdsall et al. 2005; Lawn 2010). Some scholars question the viability of the MDGs as achievement targets and consider them incongruous with the realities of life, especially in the developing world (Clemens et al. 2006). Others see them as a "faulty yardstick for judging whether country- or region-specific performances are on track" (Vandemoortele 2009, 356).

This volume focuses mostly on the manner of the centrality of Africa's development in the broader analyses of the MGDs' success. There is an increasing concern about Africa, the poorest continent, which has a sizeable population whose future appears to hold, as of the present, little chance of improving. Africa, for instance, represents 11% of the world's population but is responsible for "more than half of all maternal and child deaths, two thirds of the global AIDS burden, and 90% of

deaths from malaria" (Lawn 2010, 566). Access to Universal Primary Education (UPE), the pace of the HIV/AIDS spread, and response to violence against women have not met expected targets (UN 2011). With the approach of 2015, these challenges increasingly provoke public and scholarly discussions.

This volume is yet another contribution to the debate—but a unique one in many respects. The parties involved as well as the nature of the debate not only introduces new knowledge but also invites responses from readers. This volume is the result of a critical, in-depth deliberation among a group of interested parties whose scholarship not only intersects with the challenges embraced by the MDGs but also foregrounds their future as stakeholders. On January 30, 2014, close to a hundred participants arrived at the University of Alberta main campus to begin a 2-day retrospective look at the MDGs with a special focus on the African continent. Among the attendees were seasoned academics from Canadian universities, NGO and civil society representatives, and emerging scholars from both the continent and its new diasporas. The development of a forum to deliberate on Africa's future was the vision of the University of Alberta's African Students' Association. This vision was spearheaded notably by Nathan Andrews and supported by a diverse team of students, alumni, and faculty members. While a number of scholars, including myself, bought into the initiative, it was these emerging scholars that worked tirelessly to bring the relevant stakeholders together, engaged funding agencies, and propelled the process into a highly successful conference.

The conference was planned to coincide with the University of Alberta's International Week, an annual event which brings academia and the surrounding community into dialogue. It also attracts internationally renowned scholars and development practitioners at the cutting edge of their fields to the campus to share new knowledge and pressing issues of global importance. The conference revolved around the eight MDGs with critical questions raised about Democracy, Leadership and Governance, Gender Policies, Politics and Practices, Health Challenges, the Post-MDGs Era, Poverty Eradication, External Partnerships and Encountering Marginalized Populations, Climate Change, Food Security, and Environmental Sustainability. The contributions came from a wide range of disciplines including Political Science, History Sociology, International Relations, African Studies, Anthropology, and Women and Gender Studies. Their analyses provide a critical, retrospective look at the MDGs not simply as targets to be achieved but as a set of guidelines for tracking development priorities in a globalizing world. As many scholars remind us, "The MDGs are global goals which are a policy instrument used by the UN to draw attention to urgent but neglected global priorities" (Fukuda-Parr et al. 2013, 20). These scholars enjoin us to avoid holding on to them as clearly set out goals to be technically measured periodically. MDGs, they argue, should remain as "benchmarks in monitoring progress toward important objectives" as well as policy statements "to communicate an important normative objective based on shared value" (Ibid.).

These directions, in my view, were the "normative" tenets which guided our discussions at the conference. They also strongly resonate in this volume. The editors have worked hard to capture the scholarly discourse which engaged African and

Africanist graduate students; University of Alberta scholars; visiting experts, academics, and practitioners in various areas of development; and community representatives. The volume is aimed at a wide audience including students, academics, and practitioners in the field. It draws from a broad range of historical, contemporary, and emerging discourses on African and global development. Its contributors were also mindful of intersectional cleavages such forums must invade and stressed the implications of gender, class, and race, making Africa's postcolonial development conditions in sociocultural, political, and economic contexts central. Both those involved in the discussion on the MDGs as well as those seeking to learn more about them will find in this volume a comfortable level ground. It represents not only an important contribution to the MDG debates but also a strategic resource as we approach "the year of reckoning," 2015.

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Chapter 1
Introduction: Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Retrospect in Africa

Nene Ernest Khalema, Nathan Andrews, and N'Dri T. Assié-Lumumba

The onset of independence in the 1950s and 1960s heralded a new desire for the promotion of socioeconomic development among the newly independent states. The African populations and leadership engaged in the struggle for freedom had no intention to relinquish their aspirations for socioeconomic uplifting and social progress. They had ideas and resolve to develop the skills, strategies and means to achieve their developmental goals, instead of delegating their roles to others. Thus, African scholars and nationalist political leaders envisioned paths of development that challenged the Western conception of one inevitable and unilinear modernization model (Hettne 1995; Nkrumah 1963; Nyerere 1973) to be applied universally.

However, by and large, in post-colonial Africa, development strategies and prescriptions for achieving them have remained a territory traversed predominantly by non-African actors and interests, mainly in a neocolonial framework. This has incensed public scholars such as Samir Amin (1990) to propose delinking from the colonial structure in order to promote social progress in Africa. Indeed, the colonially designed framework that is used in the post-colonial context reproduces old paradigms that constituted part of the official justification and narrative of the

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colonial domination. The tenet of the argument frames the African people as the perpetually immature beings whose advancement will always depend on the good will of the colonizers. The notion of the "white man's burden" may not be used because it may no longer be politically correct, but it shapes the development and assistance program.

Innumerable development initiatives have been conceived, concaved, and implemented for many years by Northern interests, exposing how these negligible remedies have fuelled dependency. In this context, knowledge about Africa's development is framed from particular standpoints pronouncing a pessimistic tone marked with a quest for recycled and repackaged development prescriptions. In advancing this quest, a number of development strategies have re-emerged including a globally embraced notion of advancing the millennium development goals (MDGs). The MDGs were adopted by a number of heads of states in 2000 to address the world's most staggering development issues (see United Nations 2013a). Meeting the goals, or even substantial progress towards meeting them, promises to produce a healthier, more economically sound world. The normative consensus arrived at in 2000 attracted the attention and support of many organizations and individuals interested in international development.

The Millennium declaration depicts the eight MDGs as the world's time-bound targets for addressing extreme poverty, hunger, disease, child mortality and maternal health and for promoting gender equality, education, global partnership and environmental sustainability. The most ambitious goal, perhaps, is that of reducing the 1990 levels of poverty by half (i. e. reducing the 30 % of people living under $1 a day to 15 %) by 2015 (Besley and Burgess 2003). By signing the Millennium declaration, leaders of the world collectively promised a better life to the world's most vulnerable people. Their collective promise—encapsulated in the MDGs— embraces a vision for the world in which developed and developing countries would work in partnership for enduring global transformation. Unlike the Washington Consensus of the 1980s and 1990s, which lacked overarching global consensus, the Millennium declaration entreated Northern countries to express greater commitments to the world's most vulnerable people.

Teething social, economic, and political challenges that weaken Africa's transformation from the so-called "dark continent" besets the possibilities of the MDGs as an all-encompassing prescription. Achieving the MDGs in Africa holds the promise of saving millions of lives; empowering women; addressing the scourge of illiteracy, malnutrition and hunger; and ensuring that Africa's most vulnerable in the continent have access to high-quality education, economic opportunity, and good health to lead fulfilled lives (Wagstaff and Claeson 2004). Thus, concrete development targets in agriculture, nutrition, education, health and infra- structure are pledged, and promises are specified that if MDGs are fully addressed, African communities will be positioned to raise productivity and compete successfully in world markets, thus improving their livelihoods. For African governments, investing in the MDGs and promoting the private sector collaborations is encouraged and motivated as a new path towards stability and sustained growth. Furthermore, governments are encouraged to engage in fiscal economic activity that will build capital, attract foreign investment and overcome Africa's current need for external aid assistance.

Recent reports by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund assert that although progress has been made globally in achieving the MDGs, many developing countries, particularly in Africa remain off track to meeting them by 2015 (IMF and World Bank 2009; World Bank and IMF 2010). This is particularly true in large parts of Africa where some states are fragile or emerging from conflict. The continent as a whole is lagging behind on each MDG despite a very encouraging recent rise in the rate of economic growth, an overall improvement in the policy environment, and strong macroeconomic fundamentals. Notwithstanding the need to unpack the metric of measuring progress towards addressing the MDGs, the continent nonetheless has made some progress. Economically, the continent has continued to enjoy an average annual economic growth rate of about 5 % in recent years; the global economic world order is destined to catch-up with the continent. According to UNDP (2013), Africa's impressive economic performance has "rekindled hopes for the continent's future as an important player in the global economic landscape" (4). For example, 40 of 50 countries have accelerated or maintained their rate of progress in at least 11 indicators between the pre- and post-2000 periods, confirming their commitment and effort towards the MDGs (UNDP 2013, 6). Success stories such as Mozambique, Burkina Faso, and Namibia are worth noting. According to UNDP (2013), Africa's recent MDGs performance positions the continent as the best performing continent when measured by effort. In their report entitled, *MDG Report 2013: Assessing Progress in Africa toward the Millennium Development Goals,* UNDP contends that countries such as those mentioned above have led the way in accelerating progress for 16 of the 22 MDG indicators assessed. Additionally, according to the report, the majority of countries in Southern, East, Central and West Africa have substantially improved their rate of progress toward achieving MDGs and feature among the top 20 countries progressing towards addressing the goals. For example, North African states such as, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia lead the way in accelerating or maintaining progress. The report indicates that Egypt leads in 11 indicators, followed by Morocco with 9, and Tunisia with 8 (UNDP 2013, 6).

What worked for countries doing well are effective public policies and the political will of governments to address development challenges. Measures that promote accountable and transparent governance, economic opportunities for the improvised and empowerment of women have also played a role in ensuring that the promises of MDGs are achieved. Sound public policies and investments have proven to be central for achieving MDGs and accelerating economic growth. Additionally, empowering the civil society sector has also assisted governments in focusing actions and expertise that can increase the effectiveness of service delivery, advocating for relevant programs of delivery. Although civil society organizations have been contributing to advocacy and activism, they have become more prominent in recent years, growing in scale and influence and having profound impacts on policy. Indeed, the manner in which the state responds to these changes, and the extent to which civil society actors are recognized and included in policy development are some of the critical factors determining the course of addressing MDGs in the continent.

Externally, engaging closer with emerging players on the continent such as China, Brazil and India has rekindled hope that due to such partnerships, African-centered development priorities will be realized. For instance, next to the traditional donors and international financial institutions (such as IMF and World Bank), China is an emerging financial support provider for Africa (Bräutigam 2010; Christensen 2010; Zafar 2007). Simultaneously, developing global partnerships in the framework of south-south cooperation, new political, diplomatic and economic interactions and engagement between emerging economies (India, Brazil, Turkey, etc.) and other developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America have shown promise for the continent (see Shaw et al. 2007; Vieira and Alden 2011). Possibilities of good governance and service delivery of social, economic, political, and cultural industries has become increasingly intricate as newer players such as China, India, Brazil, Russia (the BRIC), and to some extent home-grown powers such as Nigeria and South Africa, strive to out-compete traditional economic players of the yester-years such as the EU, Japan, and US, which are the traditional sources of development prescriptions.

Regarding the argument of new versus "traditional" donors, it is worth mentioning a little further the recent and ongoing debates of the critical issues involved. Considering the abusive historical policies of most of the Western donors as colonial/imperial powers, there are legitimate reasons to tend to articulate the differences and possible similarities in binary terms of bad versus good, exploitative and deceptive versus fair and benevolent motives. However, the comparative costs and benefits to African countries from the categories of donors presented in chronological terms have raised questions about the legitimacy of this categorization. While focusing on Latin America, Robledo (2014) poses broader questions in "New Donors, Same Old Practices? South-South Cooperation in Emerging Countries" that can be extended to other emerging economies that have provided various forms of "assistance" to African countries. From the perspective of the Chinese official position based in the country's contemporary history, the state ideology and the pledge made at the Bandung Conference of 1955 where African and Asian countries adopted four goals and ten principles that prioritized mutual respect and cooperation, China, for instance made an official commitment toward African countries that is consistent with the Bandung resolutions. However, the nature, goals, extent, and the official and actual "assistance" that China has been providing to African countries has provoked debates regarding the motivations and eventual outcome of this assistance (Brautigam 2009; Woods 2008). The characteristics of the countries that have been targeted as recipients of "aid" and the trends tend to support the arguments that no matter the appearance of immediate benefits and the promise of the new form and sources for "aid" African countries must exercise prudence and vigilance.

Nevertheless, it is evident that given the urgency of the MDGs, with its conditionalities, has borne both costs and benefits, whilst the hegemonic form of development prescribed by Northern interests created policy orphans in most African states. As we are fast approaching the 2015 MDGs deadline, and given

the negative effects of the recent global economic crisis, the impact of the global recession on growth rates, and the reluctance of some international donors to step up their efforts in the current economic climate, it has become clear that the MDGs will not be reached in most sub-Saharan African states (see Conceição et al. 2011).

Progress towards achieving the eight Millennium Development Goals in African countries is marginal at best and poor at worst. In its 2013 report on the progress towards the accomplishment of the MDGs, in six of the eight goals, the United Nations expects that by 2015, African countries south of the Sahara will have made progress insufficient to reach the target if prevailing trends persist (United Nations 2013b). Furthermore, the challenge of meeting the MDGs in African countries is compounded by the grave long-term risk of conflicts; African countries demonstrably require additional resources to intervene in such conflicts since they are particularly vulnerable to the effects of war, global terrorism, and the growing risk of war crimes, human trafficking, and its aftermath. Such discouraging or if you like, sobering reflections on Africa's achievement of the MDGs began to proliferate just a couple of years after the adoption of the goals (see Sahn and Stifel 2003). Despite the fact that several of the goals are certainly lagging behind, there is one campaign that has often depicted Sub-Saharan Africa so poorly that even successes sometimes look like failures. Easterly (2009) identifies a few of such statements in his article (see p. 26):

Africa…is the only continent not on track to meet any of the goals of the Millennium Declaration by 2015. (UN World Summit Declaration in 2005)

in Africa… the world is furthest behind in progress to fulfill [the MDGs]…Africa is well behind target on reaching all the goals. (Blair Commission for Africa, 2005)

Sub-Saharan Africa, which at current trends will fall short of all the goals. (World Bank and IMF Global Monitoring Report 2005, in the foreword by James Wolfensohn and Rodrigo de Rato)

Sub-Saharan Africa, most dramatically, has been in a downward spiral of AIDS, resurgent Malaria, falling food output per person, deteriorating shelter conditions, and environmental degradation, so that most countries in the region are on a trajectory to miss most or all of the Goals… The region is off-track to meet every MDG. (UN Millennium Project report 2005)

At the midway point between their adoption in 2000 and the 2015 target date for achieving the MDGs, Sub-Saharan Africa is not on track to achieve any of the Goals. (UN MDGs report in 2007)

Among all regions of the world it is in Africa that we stand a real risk of not meeting the MDGs by 2015. (a statement by the then Nigerian President, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, at the 2008 World Economic Forum in Davos)

The narratives above have helped to undersell any success sub-Saharan Africa may have chalked over the past decade and a half since the goals came into being. It has been argued that overall the MDGs have not been fair to Africa because they "are poorly and arbitrarily designed to measure progress against poverty and deprivation, and that their design makes Africa look worse than it really is" (Easterly 2009, 26).

This tends to further exaggerate the tragic Africa story and reinforces the role of the West as a saviour (for the normalization of the African experience as tragedy, see Smith 2006). The idea of progress or lack of it, in quantitative or qualitative terms, raises critical questions regarding the reference for the comparison and what criteria and by whom such criteria were conceptualized, designed and adopted. This is not to say the story is rosy, but it is meant to suggest that alternative measurement methods can possibly showcase Africa in a positive light, in terms of outperforming global averages in the progress towards the MDGs (Fukuda-Parr et al. 2013). Having said that, the fact that most African countries will not be able to achieve most of the MDGs in 2015 raises a number of questions for both academics and development practitioners. African countries have only made progress in reducing the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (including non-communicable diseases) and achieved close to parity in girls' enrolment in primary school under the goal of promoting gender equality and empowering women. Other corresponding indicators that corroborate these observations include indices of life expectancy; literacy levels and mortality rates remain especially high for women.

While acknowledging the progressive nature of the MDGs and their integral role in mobilizing resources to aid African countries, there remain concerns, for instance, about the arbitrary way of measuring progress towards the goals. Even where progress is being made (i. e. Mozambique, Bukina Faso and others), improvements are often not evenly shared. Women, the poorest of the poor and those who live in rural areas tend to benefit less. It is therefore imperative to examine its impact on Africa's development post-2015. Eventualities such as climate change, natural disasters, and above all, the global financial downturn were not factored into the promulgation of these goals. Yet, will they be ample scapegoats for the rather uneven gains of these ambitious targets? What potential alternatives could replace the unattained goals once the 2015 deadline is reached? Do African governments have the potential and political will to carry these goals through? With these questions in mind, the overall objective of this book is to assess and reflect on the current state of MDGs in the context of Africa, critically examine the successes, gaps and failures of the stated goals, including lessons learned and possibilities ahead, and most importantly envision a post-2015 (and post-MDGs) development agenda for Africa, led by Africans for Africa.

Our book generally addresses these questions and many more. Collectively, the chapters argue that despite the noble intentions of the MDGs prescription, the goals are mere adaptations and reconstructions of dominant Northern paradigms that exaggerate the value of economic goods and wealth creation founded on a competitive and unequal field of marketplace by making them immutable features of development and its relevant indicators. In this way, MDG prescriptions perpetuate the same old story of African development as the continent strides towards transformation. We argue for the contribution of Africans in articulating what development means for them.

More importantly, we offer an opportunity for African scholars to reflect about what, why, and how the talk about MDGs has contributed to a rethinking of a development vision for Africa particularly since the dawn of development talk in the