Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals: A Review

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Abstract
This paper reviews the characteristics of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as their contribution to world development. The paper contends that the SDGs are likely to be achieved given that there is a comprehensive monitoring framework for the goals. The monitoring framework requires countries to produce progress reports that are subsequently reviewed at regional and global forums. The paper further highlights that the implementation of SDGs requires significant resources. Governments in the developing world will therefore have to foster environments that will attract both local and foreign investors with a view to creating   viable economies that can support the implementation of the various SDGs.
Keywords: Millennium Development Goals, Sustainable Development Goals, development theory, developing countries

Introduction

The history of the theory and practice of development shows development as a multifaceted process. One of the strengths of development theories lies in recognising the complex interconnections between cultural, economic, political and technological change. The road to development has not been as smooth as modernisation theorists predicted. As early as the 1960s, dependency theorists criticised their predictions as an ideological screen that concealed the exploitation of the poorer countries by the wealthier countries. From the dependency perspective, development was always a doomed project, condemned to fail as long as the economic bonds that tie the poorer countries to the richer countries remained secured. Wade (2004) argues that the gap between the rich who mainly reside in the North and the poor who largely live in the South "is a structural divide, not just a matter of a lag in the South's catch-up." This structural explanation for the failure of the development project contrasts with the answer that modernisation theory gives for lack of success – the failure of poorer countries to transform their traditional norms and attitudes, institutions, economy and political processes along modern lines.

The disappointment with the experiences of these earlier development theories has led to the international community to come up with new development paradigms. These new paradigms were echoed in the Millennium Development Goals, agreed to by the world's leaders at the United Nations (UN) in 2000 whose burial and memorial services were held in 2015 after the adoption of a new set of development objectives under the name of Sustainable Development Goals. These MDGS and SDGs are all informed by the development theory perspective at the levels of theory and praxis. We will briefly highlight the basic trajectory of the development path over time.

2. The development trajectory over time.

The desire to achieve certain levels of development has preoccupied development theorists over time. While there is no unanimity on what particular development theories are applicable to each region or society, there is a consensus that all societies aspire to a certain level of development in which the society's basic health, social and economic needs are catered for in a sustainable manner. The table below summarises some of the various conceptualizations of development over time.

Table 1: Meanings of development over time

Period	Perspectives	Meaning of Development
1800s	Classical political economy	Remedy for progress; catching up
1870 >	Latecomers	Industrialisation, catching-up
1850 >	Colonial economics	Resource management, trusteeship
1940 >	Development economics	Economic growth – industrialisation
1950 >	Modernisation theory	Growth, political and social modernisation
1960 >	Dependency theory	Accumulation – national, autocentric
1970 >	Alternative development	Human flourishing
1980 >	Human development	Capacitation, enlargement of people's Choices
1980 >	Neo-liberalism	Economic growth – structural reform, deregulation, liberalisation, privatisation
1990 >	Post-development	Authoritarian engineering, disaster
2000	Millennium Development Goals	Structural reforms
2016	Sustainable Development Goals	Structural and institutional reforms

Adapted from Pieterse, 2009:5

The above table shows that development is a multifarious process which is not amenable to any one form of measurement. Over time it is apparent that development has several dimensions to it. First are the economic dimensions that are measurable through the use of the Groos Domestic Product (GDP) Income per capita and employment creation levels. Second are the political dimension that encapsulate political tolerance, debate and accommodation of divergent views without engaging in political violence. Finally the social focus of development is on poverty reduction, education, health, life expectancy and equality. Dudley Seers (1969:3) poses the basic question about the meaning of development succinctly by asserting:

The questions to ask about a country's development are:

What has been *happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result 'development', even if per capita income doubled.*

The focus on how the international community can facilitate the development process is therefore motivated by the need to ensure that the international community remains seized with the overall objectives of eradicating poverty in its various extreme forms.

3. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Era

At the United Nations' Millennium Summit in September 2000, the largest ever assembly of world leaders committed their governments to a goal-oriented programme named the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs were designed to: reduce extreme global poverty by half; increase participation in basic education, improve child and maternal health; achieve gender equality; control and reduce transmittable, air-borne and water-borne diseases among others.

Given its past record and the prevailing intellectual climate, the Millennium Declaration was a bold move by the United Nations (Sachs, 2005: 210). It went beyond previous schemes that set vague developmental aspirations and committed the world's richest and poorest nations to work in harmony to meet a set of quantifiable targets by the year 2015. Never before had the world community accepted such accountability, measurability and responsibility for global development. Earlier "developmental decades tended to focus on the narrower indicator of economic growth" whereas emphasis was now placed on "human well-being and poverty reduction" (UNDP, 2003:27).

The MDG partnership between the richer and poorer countries was referred to as a 'compact.' The poorer countries were responsible for providing the appropriate policy context for development (including good governance, sound economic decision-making, transparency, accountability, rule of law, respect for human rights and civil liberties and local participation). The richer countries committed themselves to meeting aid obligations in a timely, generous and co-ordinated manner while simultaneously re-negotiating debt relief and abolishing discriminatory trade restrictions against the poorer world. Kofi Annan (2005) refers to the MDGs as a "manifesto for newly enfranchised poor people throughout the world." The emphasis on goals suggested a shift away from the more market-oriented policies that the IMF and the World Bank had favoured during the previous two decades.

Criticisms of the MDGs have been varied. Kothari and Minogue (2002:12) point out that the MDGs themselves signified the 'past failure' of development as modernisation. On the one hand, the MDGs had been

seen by some as lacking ambition, especially in their primary aim to halve global poverty when over a billion people were surviving on less than US$1 per day. Others argue that the targets generated "unrealistic expectations" and oversell the "efficacy of aid" (Clemens *et al.*, 2004: 4 cited in Turner and Hume, 2007). Harcourt (2005: 2) also claims that the MDGs' emphasis on quantitative targets reveal a "technocratic…approach to an infinitely complex world." The danger with a top-down, bureaucratic approach is that important MDGs – such as health – become disconnected from the broader social and political contexts within which they are embedded including "globalisation, human security, equity, human rights and poverty reduction" (Greig, Hume and Turner, 2007:112). Another problem with the technocratic nature of the MDGs was that they became another conditionality imposed by wealthy donor countries onto recipient countries (Sadasivam, 2005: 31).

Another part of the MDG framework was the responsibility of richer countries to improve the level and quality of Official Development Assistance (ODA). ODA refers to grants and concessional loans for the promotion of economic development and welfare for poorer countries from governments of richer countries. The Commission for Africa (2005: 9) also points out that aid sometimes appears to assist the interests of the wealthy countries and large companies as much as it assists poorer countries. The MDGs are now succeeded by the Sustainable Development Goals whose life span runs from 1 January 2016 through 31 December 2030. The discussion of this new sustainable developmental approach follows below.

4. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
One of the main outcomes from the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012 was international agreement to negotiate a new set of global Sustainable Development Goals to guide the path of sustainable development in the world after 2015 (Osborn, Cutter and Ullah, 2015). The Rio+20 Outcome Document indicates that the goals are intended to be "action-oriented, concise and easy to communicate, limited in number, inspirational, 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" (United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, 2012:2 47). Table 2 below provides a list of the SDGs.

Table 2: Sustainable Development Goals

Goal	Description
SDG 1	End poverty in all its forms everywhere
SDG 2	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable
SDG 3	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
SDG 4	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all
SDG 5	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
SDG 6	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
SDG 7	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
SDG 8	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
SDG 9	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation
SDG 10	Reduce inequality within and among countries
SDG 11	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
SDG 12	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
SDG 13	Take urgent action to combat climate and its impacts
SDG 14	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
SDG 15	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reserve land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
SDG 16	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, and inclusive institutions at all levels
SDG 17	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development

Source: Leowe and Rippin, 2015

A central role of SDGs will be played by the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) which will conduct "regular reviews, starting in 2016, on follow-up and implementation of sustainable development commitments and objectives, including those related to the means of implementation, within the

context of the post-2015 agenda" (Janus and Keijzer, 2015: 9-10).

While the 17 SDGs appear to be very relevant they are also quite ambitious. Ending poverty in all its forms everywhere by 2030 is a very ambitious goal indeed. In particular, it will require tremendous efforts for most developing countries to achieve and sustain the targeted growth. For instance, by 2030, countries should eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, concurrently measured as people living on less than US$1.25 a day. The biggest question that humbly begs an answer is: will the UN escape from its inconsistent past record of executing and enforcing agreed developmental plans? Given the previous experience with the MDGs, it is understandable that the UN may perpetuate its old practices of not fully implementing the agreed development programmes seriously. Time will tell.

5. Conclusions

This paper has reviewed the characteristics of the MDGs and the SDGs as well as their contribution to world development. The SDGs are likely to be achieved because there is a very comprehensive monitoring framework for the goals. The monitoring framework requires countries to produce progress reports that are subsequently reviewed at regional and global forums. However, the implementation of SDGs requires significant resources. Governments in the developing world need to foster environments that will attract both local and foreign investors with a view to creating viable economies that can support the implementation of the various SDGs.

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