

The Power of Numbers: A Critical Review of MDG Targets for Human Development and Human Rights



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The Project



- Independent research project involving 16 scholar/practitioners. (Support and collaboration from UNDP, OHCHR, FES, Rockefeller Foundation and DHF gratefully acknowledged).
- 11 case studies, each on a specific goal/target, to trace consequences on international policy priorities and on development thinking.
- Specific concern with human development and human rights approach to development.
- Papers to be published as a special issue of the *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 2014 issue 2.

All Power of Numbers papers available at: <http://fxb.harvard.edu/working-paper-series/>



- **Synthesis Paper** Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, Alicia Ely Yamin, & Joshua Greenstein (The New School and Harvard)
- **Employment** - Rolph van der Hoeven (ISS)
- **Income Poverty** - Ugo Gentilini & Andy Sumner (WFP and Kings College, London)
- **Hunger** - Sakiko Fukuda-Parr & Amy Orr (The New School)
- **Education** - Elaine Unterhalter (London)
- **Gender-Equality** - Gita Sen & Avanti Mukherjee (Bangalore Inst of Management, U Massachusetts)
- **Child Mortality** - Elisa Diaz-Martinez & Elizabeth D. Gibbons (St. Edmunds and Harvard)
- **Maternal mortality** - Alicia Ely Yamin and Vanessa M. Boulanger (Harvard)
- **AIDS** - Nicoli Nattrass (U Cape Town)
- **Slums** - Michael Cohen (The New School)
- **Water and Sanitation** - Malcolm Langford & Inga T. Winkler (U Oslo)
- **Global partnership for development** - Aldo Caliari (Centre of Concern)
- **Two short briefing papers: Overview of Findings; Lessons for setting targets and selecting indicators**

Motivation: Global goals



- Tool of global governance - Little known about how they work and broader consequences, **intended and unintended**
- Objective: mobilize political support for neglected priorities
 - a communications tool
- Unintended consequences
 - Potential for distortionary policy effects when used as a planning and programming tool, or a monitoring and accountability tool?
 - Potential for creating new narratives to frame development agendas

Conceptual framework: indicators as a technology of governance (Merry et al 2011)



- **Power of numbers:**
 - Aura of scientific certitude, concreteness
- **Governance effects:**
 - Creates incentives for policy change by setting standards for performance that can put up for monitoring, reward and penalty
- **Knowledge effects:**
 - 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
- **MDGs effect behavior and thinking by:**
 - creating incentives by setting performance standards;
 - introducing a new narrative and discourse, redefining concepts

Findings



Intended consequences: mobilizing support –not all goals/targets are the same.

- Spectacular successes (HIV/AIDS treatment)
- Ambiguous effects (water, sanitation, maternal mortality, child survival, education)
- ‘Poor cousins’ (employment, food, partnership)

Findings – cont'd



Unintended consequences

Policy effects

- diverting attention from important objectives and challenges, redefining agendas
- Silo effects
- Perverse incentives

- *Knowledge effects*
 - Reductionism and redefining meaning of 'development'
 - Reframing development as delivering measuring results, not transformative change

Findings – cont'd



Choice of indicators - weaknesses of many MDG choices:

- lacking evidence base as planning targets
- inconsistent with international human rights standards
- mis-aligned with development priorities
- impossible to disaggregate
- potential for creating perverse incentives

Example: Hunger Goal effects



- **Policy effect on mobilizing support and new action – poor cousin**
 - MDGs focus on social sectors, not productive sectors
 - Used to justify existing programs
 - ODA trends flat
 - slow gains in reducing hunger (8 percentage pts since 1990)
 - Reinforced attention driven by 2008 crisis
- **Knowledge effect – part of new narrative on food security**
 - shifting focus in defining food security
 - strategies focus on results, focus on nutrition, shift from 1990s access agenda

Figure 1. Sectoral allocation of ODA commitments by OECD/DAC bilateral donors 1990-2012 (\$2010 million)

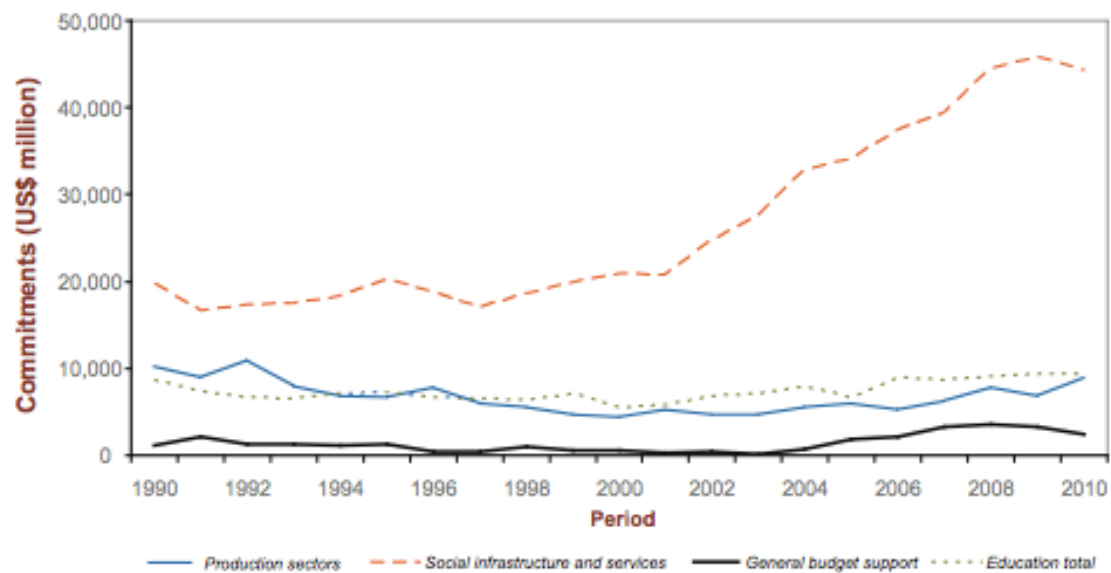
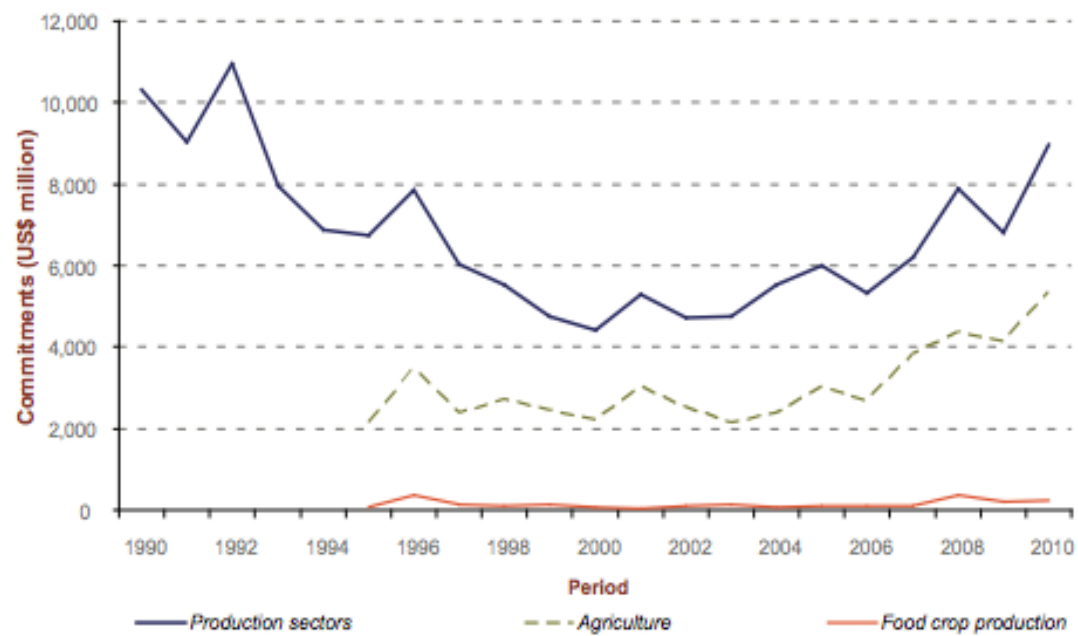


Figure 2. Allocation of ODA commitments by OECD/DAC bilateral donors selected sectors, 1990-2010 (\$2010 million)

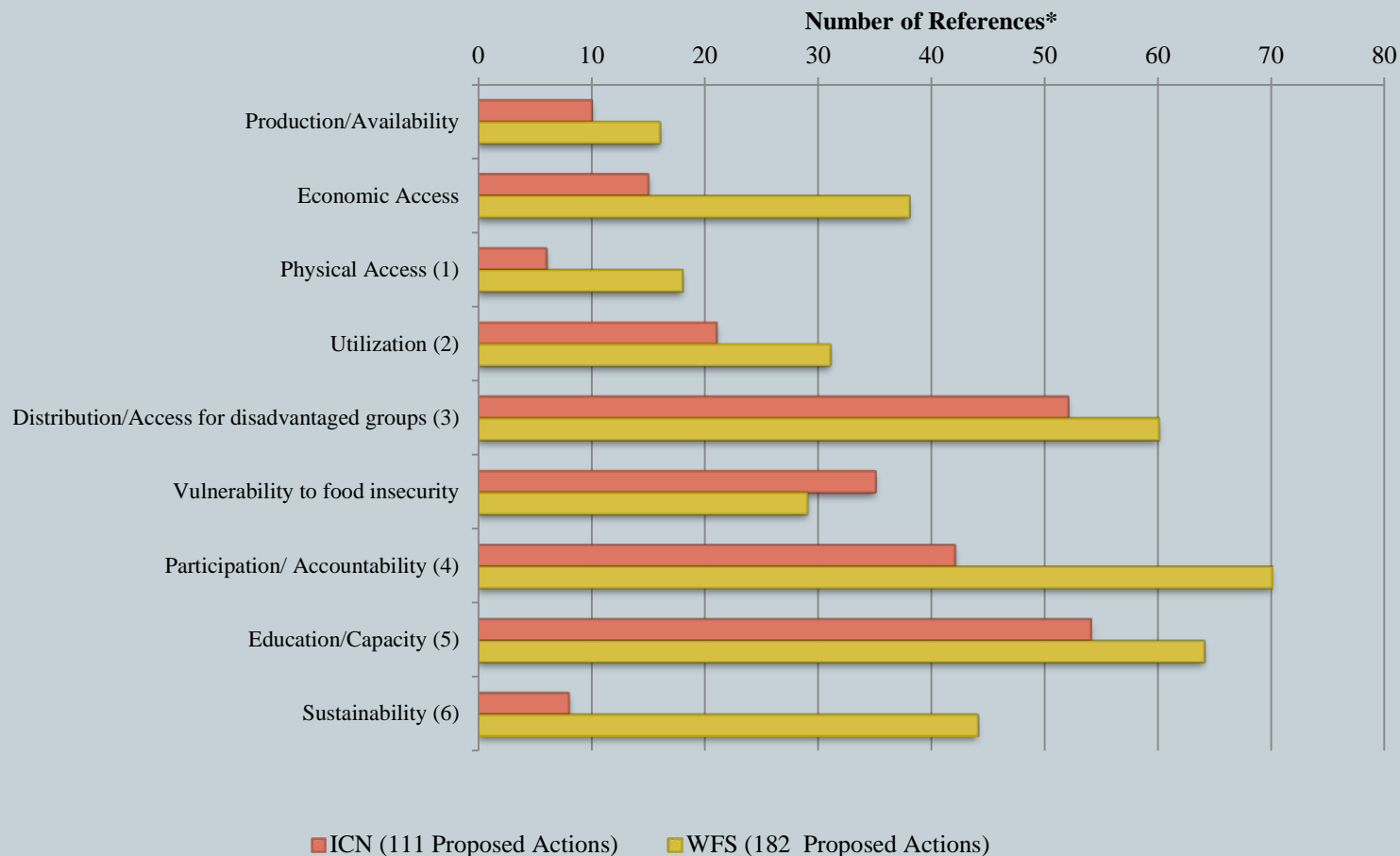


Shifts in strategies: 1990s food security – access centered human development and human rights framework

- 1992 International Nutrition Conference – Broad human development agenda addressing structural constraints (including international)
- 1996 World Food Summit – Broad human development agenda, human rights principles. 7 commitments, 27 strategic objectives. *Goal* to halve the *number* of undernourished
- Food security, nutrition in 1990s UN conferences on women, social development, children, sustainable development, population.

ICN (1992) & WFS (1996)

Human Rights/Human Development Focus



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.

Brazil's Fome Zero Program: HD/HR framework – multisectoral, local capacities, horizontal/vertical mix



STRUCTURAL POLICIES

Job and Income Generation
Universal Social Security
Incentives to Family Farming
Agrarian Reform Intensification
Bolsa Escola (School Grant program) and Minimum Income

SPECIFIC POLICIES

Food Card Program
Donations of Emergency Food Baskets
Food Security Stocks
Food Security and Quality
Expansion of the PAT
Actions against Child and Mother Undernutrition
Expansion of the School Meal Program
Education for Consumption and Food Education

LOCAL POLICIES

Rural Areas

- Support to family farming
- Support to production for self-consumption

Small and Medium-sized Cities

- Food bank
- Partnerships with retailers
- Modernization of supply facilities
- New relationship with supermarkets
- Urban agriculture

Metropolises

- Subsidized Restaurants for the Low-Income Population
- Food Bank
- Partnerships with retailers
- Modernization of Supply Facilities
- New relationship with supermarket chains

Post 2000 initiatives and strategies – shifts away from 90's HD/HR framework

- **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**

Gates: Ten Largest Ag & Nutrition Grants

Date	Name	Topic	Grant (US\$ millions)	Purpose of Grant
2007	Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa	Agricultural Development	148	Increase smallholder access to locally appropriate fertilizer , extend integrated soil fertility management practices including efficient fertilizer and organic matter use, and improve fertilizer and soil extension policies
2008	Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)	Nutrition	122	Contribute to improved nutrition by increasing access to and utilization of fortified foods
2006	Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa	Agricultural Development	97	Increase access of smallholder farmers to improved crop varieties using a variety of production and distribution strategies
2008	United Nations World Food Programme	Agricultural Development	66	Improve market opportunities for smallholder farmers across ten countries through the expansion of food purchasing mechanisms
2011	Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa	Agricultural Development	56	Increase the availability and accessibility of more resilient and higher yielding seed varieties of important food crops in sub-Saharan Africa
2007	Heifer Project International	Agricultural Development	51	Increase the incomes of smallholder dairy farmers through enhancing their access to and profit from dairy markets, improving the productivity of their cows and increasing their access to and use of improved inputs
2007	TechnoServe, Inc.	Agricultural Development	47	Help entrepreneurial men and women in poor rural areas of the developing world build business that create income, opportunity, and economic growth for their families, their communities and their nations
2001	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development	Nutrition	47	Support the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), to save lives and improve health through the elimination of vitamin and mineral deficiencies in developing countries
2012	African Agricultural Technology Foundation	Agricultural Development	46	Develop and distribute improved maize hybrids for Africa that are drought-tolerant, insect-resistant, and higher yielding
2008	International Food Policy Research Institute	Agricultural Development	45	Develop and deliver biofortified staple crops to reduce micronutrient deficiencies in developing countries
2006	Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition	Nutrition	39	Reduce undernutrition among children 6-24 months through the identification of sustainable, market-driven models that will increase access to fortified complementary foods (and food supplements) among low-income populations

Source: (Gates Foundation, 2012)

Indicators



MDG target 1(c): halve the proportion of people suffering from hunger

- Issues: revises WFS goal number to proportion

Indicator: prevalence of underweight children under 5 years of age

- Issues: potential for perverse incentive to favor calorie rich diets; does not reflect *long term* undernutrition

Indicator: proportion of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption

- Issues: methodology of estimation; caloric supply focus; derived from national aggregates; *difficult to disaggregate*

Highlighting human development and human rights priorities



- **Outcomes and capabilities – stunting reflects severe and chronic undernutrition with long term consequences for life choices**
- **Access through exchange – share of food expenditures – note Brazil vs. Egypt**
- **Distribution – survey based outcome data more amenable to disaggregation**
- **Vulnerability and instability – food price volatility. Global markets and local markets.**

Multidimensional determinants and outcomes of food insecurity: Sub-Saharan Africa 1990-2010/12

DETERMINANTS (INPUTS) (Availability, Physical & Economic Access, Utilization)	OUTCOMES Access to and Utilization of Food	VULNERABILITY/STABILITY (Food price variability, production & supply variability, dependence on imports/cereal imports, production potential)
+ Average dietary energy supply & value of production per capita increased	+ PoU declined + Food adequacy improved	+ Food imports as a % of merchandise exports declined + Political stability improved moderately at the regional level.
+ Food diversity improved (more protein & fewer calories derived from cereals, roots, & tubers)	Weight for age: + 36 countries improved - 8 countries worsened	- Greater dependence on cereal imports
+ Increased access to water and sanitation	Height for age (stunting): + 29 countries improved	- Increased variability (food price, production, and supply)
o Decline in domestic food prices (positive for consumers, negative for producers)	- 12 countries worsened Weight for height (wasting): + 26 countries improved - 17 countries worsened	- % of arable land equipped for irrigation decreased

Source: (FAO Stat, 2012)

Implications for post-2015 agenda and SDGs



Criteria for selecting indicators:

- New approaches for 2015: IAEG ‘Lessons Learned’; HLP ‘Data revolution’
- Yet same core criteria for indicator selection: robust data; data availability

Key issues:

- ‘Not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted counts’
- Data collection follow policy priorities

Implications (cont'd)



Criteria for setting goals and targets:

- Simplicity, measurability and outcome focus

Key issues

- Reductionism of complex challenges
- Reification of intangible objectives
- Excluding key 'means' requiring international consensus
- Inadequate for a 'transformative agenda' called for by HLP and civil society consultations
- Misuse of goals as planning targets. Goals are tools for communication and mobilization, targets for monitoring

Desirable Characteristics of Goals and Targets

	Communication for political mobilisation	Monitoring progress	Monitoring for Human Rights accountability	Programming
GOALS AND TARGETS				
Scope	Simplicity (memorable but narrow)	Selective proxies for broader objectives	Selective proxies for broader objectives	Broad objectives and comprehensive dimensions
Level	Ambitious and aspirational	Realistic and benchmark (evidence based)	Ambitious but realistic, and benchmark (evidence based)	Realistic (evidence based)
Quantification	Concrete, measurable	Concrete, measurable	Concrete, measurable/quantifiable and non-quantifiable/qualitative	Qualitative and quantitative objectives
Focus	Outcome focus (easy to understand)	Outcome focus	Human outcomes, social/legal arrangements and effort (e.g., budget, policy) Linked to international standards/norms	Outcomes, institutional arrangements, policy reforms

Desirable Characteristics of Indicators

	Communication for political mobilisation	Monitoring progress	Monitoring for Human Rights accountability	Programming
INDICATORS				
Policy relevance	<p>Policy relevant</p> <p>Not subject to perverse interpretation and perverse secondary effects</p>	<p>Policy relevant; frequently measurable</p> <p>Not subject to perverse interpretation and perverse secondary effects</p>	<p>Policy relevant</p> <p>Not subject to perverse interpretation and perverse secondary effects</p>	<p>Policy sensitive (disaggregation/distribution)</p>
Data availability and reliability	Data availability and reliability	Data availability or promote data creation	Frequently measurable to hold specific administrations accountable; data availability	Data availability and promote data creation
Level of aggregation	Global aggregate, Inter-country comparability	<p>Global aggregate, Inter-country comparability</p> <p>Subject to disaggregation/distribution qualitative as well as quantitative</p>	<p>Linked to international standards; subject to disaggregation/distribution along gender, ethnicity, race, etc. (“prohibited grounds”) as well as income quintiles; comparable across time/countries</p> <p>Subject to local assessment/ evaluation through transparent methodology</p>	<p>Country and location-specific</p> <p>Subject to disaggregation/distribution; comparable</p>
Measurable, quantitative or qualitative	Quantitative	Qualitative and quantitative information	Qualitative and quantitative information	Qualitative and quantitative information

Limitations of 'the goal approach'



- Policy objective of global goals: mobilize attention to neglected and urgent priorities – a communications device (simple, concrete outcomes)
- Policy objective of targets and indicators: monitor progress, create accountability (measurable results)
- Misused as a planning framework
- Inappropriate for defining agendas

Global goals should serve to communicate and monitor – not define - priority agendas

Post 2015 agenda needs a consensus on a transformative agenda with a new strategy (means)

Thank you!



- All Power of Numbers papers available at FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, Harvard School of Public Health:
<http://fxb.harvard.edu/working-paper-series/>
- 11 case studies
- 1 synthesis paper
- 2 briefing notes