Beyond the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): Changing norms and meeting targets

Description

Tweet

Sussex Development Lecture, 10 March, by David Hulme

Text summary below is from IDS. A PowerPoint version of the same argument is also available from IDS.

[RDâ??s Comments can be found at the end of the text summary]

â??David Hulme examined the impact of the MDGs, arguing that their replacement could not be driven by results alone. Building political will and public consensus is crucial if we are to effectively tackle world poverty.

The story so far

David set out a short history of the MDGs, articulating how their creation was brought about by a drive to strengthen the credibility of the UN and promote reform. The MDGs represented a blueprint designed to improve planning and financing, and a desire to demonstrate value for money. David explained how he thought that the impact of the MDGs was limited, with too greater a focus on results and targets.

Changing norms, ending poverty

David argued that we need to look beyond results and targets. We need to achieve a cultural shift that results in a strong belief amongst politicians and the public that ending extreme global poverty is a moral imperative.

The tipping point

David went on to explain that to change norms we rely on â??norm entrepreneursâ?? such as Jim Grant (PDF), Nafis Sadik (PDF) or Clare Short. They challenged some of the ingrained notions within international development in the late 1990s and were instrumental in changing the agenda to place greater emphasis on human development and gender equality.

Alongside norm entrepreneurs there are message entrepreneurs who play a crucial role in building the necessary consensus to formulate policy. Such message entrepreneurs include James Michel, John Ruggie and Mark Malloch Brown.

The supernorm

David argued that the impact of the MDGs has been limited due to their length and relative complexity. In a world overloaded with information, messages need to be simple and tangible if we want to build support and consensus around them. He suggested that the MDGs should be succeeded by the

supernorm of extreme poverty is morally unacceptable. It represents a tangible concept which the majority can understand and are likely to support.

David concluded that whatever replaces the MDGs needs to move beyond economic growth as the overriding driver, with a greater focus placed upon changing norms.â?•

> **[RDâ??s comment]** One way of changing norms would be to move the focus of the monitoring process, away from the change itself, and *towards the agent responsible for its delivery* i.e. principally governments. Years ago I did some work with the ILO re its International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour, which received substantial funding from the US Department of Labor. I argued, unsuccessfully at the time, that the ILO should not be reporting on the number of children removed from child labour per se, but *on the number of governments* who had managed to reduce the incidence of child labour on some common yardstick. ILO is not responsible for the reduction in child labour, country governments are where the responsibility lays. ILO helps goverments, and others, so its metrics should focus on changes in governmentsâ?? behavior, expecially the changes in the incidence of child labour that those governments are able to (publicly and accurately) report. [This could be described as a kind of meta-indicator]
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> More recently DFID has been coming out with similar misplaced targets, possibly in order to meet a perceived public need for simple messages about aid. In the UK Aid Review they claim â??To change lives and deliver results, we will:â?¦Save the lives of 50,000 women in pregnancy and childbirthâ?¦Stop 250,000 newborn babies dying needlesslyâ?¦.etcâ?• This sort of message is enough to tear your hair out. It contradicts decades of investment in development education in the UK, and under-estimates the intelligence of the UK public, most of whom know that it is governance problems that are at the heart of many failures of countries to develop.
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> Other targets on the DFID list use the classic aid agency hedge of referring to â??supportingâ?• â??helpingâ?• or â??providingâ?• something e.g. â??Support 13 countries to hold freer and fairer electionsâ?• Taken literally, these are input measures of performance, easy to achieve and as such of limited value. A better target would be something more straightforward, along the lines of â??13 countries will have freer and fairer elections (as defined byâ?¦), or even â??government of 13 countries will ensure there are freer and fairer electionsâ?¦â?• Yes, I do recognise that other parties as well governments have responsibilities here, but it is governments which frame those possibilities. Indicators couched in these actor-centred terms would also be useful in other ways, they would be much easier for other agencies to buy into, and collectively work towards.

Further information [on David Hulmeâ??s presentation]

Hulme, D. (2010) Global Poverty: How Global Governance is Failing the Poor, (PDF) (London: Routledge)

Fukuda-Parr, S. and Hulme, D. (2011) International Norm Dynamics and the â??End of Povertyâ?•: Understanding the Millennium Development Goalsâ??, (PDF) Journal of Global Governance, 17(1), pp. 17-36.

Hulme, D. and Scott, J. (2010) The Political Economy of the MDGs: Retrospect and Prospect for the Worldâ??s Biggest Promiseâ??, New Political Economy, (PDF), New Political Economy 15(2), pp. 293-306.

Category

1. Uncategorized

Tags

1. MDGs
2. norms
3. UN

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