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Africa and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): What's Right, What's Wrong and What's Missing.

África y los Objetivos de Desarrollo del Milenio (ODM): Aciertos, Errores y Olvidos.

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Abstract.

The deadline of 2015 for the MDGs is getting dangerously close. It is well known that most African countries will not meet most MDGs set out in 2000 as an ambitious plan to achieve fast socio-economic progress in developing countries. This article introduces a special issue to the problematic of MDGs in Africa, progress achieved, challenges and what is missing from the MDG agenda. The article provides an overview of the situation with regards to the MDGs, with particular emphasis on the objective of reducing poverty, which is highly associated with the other MDGs. It is shown that the record in poverty reduction has been generally disappointing. Besides, the poverty reduction agenda has contributed to the fall of "grand narratives" of development and the demise of the idea of "development" as understood in the traditions of old development economics and political economy of development. The New Poverty and the MDG agendas have been relatively successful in garnering support to increase international assistance for basic needs in African countries, but are much less impressive in terms of achieved outcomes and their contribution to development strategies. The paper finally introduces the main contents of the special issue and some of the most salient critical points from a set of articles that critically engage with dominant discourses around MDGs in Africa.

Keywords: MDGs; Africa; Poverty; Development.

Resumen.

El plazo de 2015 para los ODM se acerca peligrosamente. Es sabido que la mayoría de países africanos no alcanzarán los ODM establecidos en el año 2000 como un plan ambicioso para conseguir avances socio-económicos rápidos en países en desarrollo. Este artículo opera de introducción a esta sección especial dedicada a la problemática de los ODM en África, los logros alcanzados, los desafíos y qué es lo que falta en la agenda de los ODM. El artículo aporta una panorámica de la situación de los ODM, centrándose particularmente en el objetivo de reducción de la pobreza extrema, que está estrechamente relacionado con los otros ODM. Se plantea que el desempeño en materia de reducción de la pobreza ha sido decepcionante. Además, la agenda para la reducción de la pobreza ha contribuido a la marginación de las "grandes narrativas" del desarrollo y del mismo concepto de desarrollo como se acuñó en las tradiciones de la economía del desarrollo estructuralista y de la economía política del desarrollo. Las Nuevas Agendas de la Pobreza y de los ODM han sido relativamente exitosas a la hora de movilizar apoyos para incrementar la ayuda internacional dedicada a las necesidades básicas en África, pero son mucho menos efectivas en términos de resultados obtenidos y de su contribución a las estrategias de desarrollo. El artículo concluye con una introducción comentada a los contenidos de esta sección especial, con unos artículos que plantean una perspectiva crítica a los discursos dominantes de la agenda de los ODM en África.

Palabras clave: ODM; África; Pobreza; Desarrollo.

JEL Classification: N37; O10; I32

1. Introduction.

Adopted by the United Nations in 2001 as key targets for developing countries, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), focus on the objective of lifting millions of people out of poverty and improving the most basic social indicators. The deadline of 2015 for the MDGs is getting dangerously close. It is well known that most African countries will not meet most MDGs. This article serves as an introduction to the special issue on MDGs in Africa[1] for *Revista de Economía Mundial*, and addresses a set of broad critical issues regarding the MDG agenda for Africa.

The MDGs have shaped the engagement of OECD donors in Africa for over a decade and have provided a push to greater commitments to the improvement of basic social indicators, in contrast with the neglect that was characteristic of the Washington Consensus era of the 1980s and 1990s. While acknowledging the progressive nature of these goals and the role it has played in mobilising resources to aid African countries, this article and the special issue, however, take a critical stance with respect to the MDG agenda for Africa. This article provides a broad critical overview of the nature and application of the MDG and poverty reduction agenda to Sub-Saharan Africa. The main drawbacks and contradictions in the MDG agenda, both generally and in relation to Sub-Saharan Africa, are briefly discussed. The poverty reduction agenda, which is at the heart of the MDGs, and some of its most salient implications are also critically assessed from a long-term historical perspective that aims to bring back the "grand narratives" of development. Finally, the contents of the special issue are briefly summarised in light of the issues raised in this article.

[1] By "Africa" I mean Sub-Saharan Africa, which is the main focus of this special issue.

2. Pessimism about MDGs: Africa Will Not Meet the MDGs.

It has been clear for some time that the MDGs will not be reached for most indicators in most SSA countries (Sahn and Stifel, 2003). Recent reports seem to corroborate such projections, especially after taking into account the negative effects of the global crisis since 2008 on the track towards the MDG targets (World Bank and IMF, 2010). The fact that most African countries will not be able to achieve most of the MDGs in 2015 causes serious concern, especially among development agencies that have adopted the MDG agenda as a core guide for their engagement in Africa. Thus the MDG Africa Steering Committee stated in 2008 that "the continent as a whole is lagging behind on each Goal despite a very encouraging recent rise in the rate of economic growth". Of course, it is also acknowledged that many African countries will be able to achieve some of the goals, with the exception of MDG5 on maternal mortality, which seems beyond reach for almost all countries. In this vein, the progress of Malawi in MDG4 is usually highlighted, as well as Senegal's progress to meet the water target and Tanzania's remarkable achievement in primary completion rates.

The pessimism surrounding progress towards poverty reduction and the improvement of some basic social indicators turns into despair when it is acknowledged that African countries are unlikely to garner the level of external funding that would be necessary to attain such ambitious goals. This is particularly worrying in the context of global recession, which is inimical to the implementation of promises towards aid scaling-up, as pointed out by some of the articles in this special issue. Given the negative effects of the 2007-08 food crisis on nutrition and poverty targets, 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 seems very unlikely that the big ambitions and promises made by the MDG Africa Steering Committee for the period 2008-2015 will be met.

The MDG1 to halve poverty between 1990 and 2015 is one that puts Sub-Saharan Africa on the spot. According to the latest estimates by the *Global Monitoring Report 2010* (World Bank and IMF, 2010), poverty incidence in SSA in 2015 will be 38% taking into account the post-crisis scenario, higher than the pre-crisis scenario of 36%. In a low-growth scenario, the incidence is likely to be higher, at around 44%, which would imply only a marginal decline in the poverty incidence since 1981. This means that, whatever the scenario under consideration, SSA as a region will not meet the central MDG on poverty reduction, while on a global scale the target of halving absolute poverty incidence will be met, thanks to fast progress in Asia in particular. In terms of absolute numbers, the bleak low-growth scenario in SSA would mean an increase in the number of poor people from 296 million in 1990 to 421 million in 2015. Similarly bleak scenarios appear for nutrition and hunger targets as Pérez de Armiño shows in this issue.

Moreover, one of the targets that look more worrisome is child mortality, as analysed by Brikci and Holder in this special issue. The target is to reach a target of 61/1000 by 2015 but in 2007 the indicator had only declined to 146/1000 from a very high 183/1000 rate. In the best-case scenario SSA would only achieve a 139/1000 rate by 2015, very far from the original target (World Bank and IMF, 2010). Most other targets will not be met either at the regional level, though the shortfall is likely to be less alarming in the case of education targets, especially gender parity.

The global pessimism often translates into gloom at country level and too many African countries are too far from the original targets to take them seriously. In response to this, development institutions and the African Union push for an even greater aid commitment to reach the goals, given that failing to achieve MDG targets is seen as a great risk. Thus it is said that "since the MDGs are too important to fail, the second half of the MDG period, which begins in 2008, must focus squarely on scaling up proven interventions to achieve the Goals." (MDG-ASG, 2008).

3. So What? What's Wrong with the MDG Agenda in Africa.

Pessimism can easily turn into cynicism if the MDG agenda is regarded as a public relations exercise with little effect on actually implemented policies and outcomes. Indeed, some may think that not achieving the MDGs in Africa is not a surprise and that the targets set in the 1990s did not seriously consider Africa's conditions to meet the challenge. It is an expected outcome after decades of sluggish performance in terms of poverty reduction and economic growth. Although human development does not perfectly correlate with economic growth and structural economic transformations, lessons from history show that, in the long run, it is hard to achieve substantial gains in health and education, for example, without concomitant economic transformations (Pritchett and Summers, 2001; Amsden, 2010). Indeed, the World Bank, in its framework for the global monitoring of the MDGs considers economic growth and the delivery of services to the poor as the two pillars of MDG progress (World Bank and IMF, 2010). So, it is recognised that poverty reduction and progress in MDGs is embedded in a process of economic development. However, a question arises as to how the links between economic growth and MDGs are conceptualised and what theory of growth prevails, a point to which I will come back in the next section.

The desirability of the MDGs is, at first glance, unquestionable. After all, everybody is likely to agree that African countries should make fast improvements in welfare. It is hard to question the idea that populations in very different contexts share a desire to live longer and healthier lives. Avoiding child deaths is surely a moral imperative, especially when the resources and technologies to do so are available. Likewise, a rights-based approach to education is useful to remind us that education is not just about the economic gains that a diploma may accrue to an individual but very much about self-dignity, political participation and economy-wide advances. In fact, these commonly accepted views reflect, in Gore's words, the "emergence of a global consciousness in which persons all over the world are seen as living in a single social space and the nature of their wellbeing is compared" (Gore, 2010: 70). As a result of this international consensus, in fact, MDGs have become an important motivational instrument to push for greater commitments from the international aid complex to increase funding to poor countries, and perhaps contributed in itself to an acceleration of progress towards meeting some of the MDGs (Vandemoortele, 2009; Easterly, 2009).

However, the way MDGs have been defined and quantified has set the scene for a foregone pessimism, since it would have been impossible to achieve them, given initial conditions (high levels of deprivation across most goals) and the constraints on public investment and policy space existing at the time the MDGs were agreed. There are various reasons why the MDG agenda has been criticised with reference to its application to Sub-Saharan Africa. I will summarise the main arguments below.

First, MDGs are set out as international goals but then they are translated in a very superficial manner to national and sub-national contexts. Moreover, the establishment of international goals that must be translated into national targets requires a commitment to common purposes rather than to a set of rules and standards for international conduct. Gore (2010:70) argues that this amounts to a "Faustian bargain" where "benefits of the new consensus were achieved at the cost of a major sacrifice." The sacrifice consists of subordinating national purpose to international commitments and an over-simplification of development processes on a national and global scale. The mismatch between international and national targets is particularly reflected in the case of MDG1 for poverty reduction. On a global scale the MDG target may be achieved, mainly thanks to trends in large and fast growing countries, like China, India and Indonesia, particularly in the former. According to recent estimates by the World Bank and after revisions of the international poverty line, it is possible that this target is achieved by 2015 while a majority of developing countries do not achieve it individually. Indeed, few African countries will achieve the target of halving poverty between 1990 and 2015.

Second, MDG targets were too ambitious for the majority of African countries. Easterly (2009) has persuasively shown the biases against SSA in the evaluation of performance towards the MDGs. For example, he argues that countries at lower per capita income levels are discriminated against since it takes much higher per capita GDP growth to reduce poverty in countries with low per capita GDPs and high poverty incidence rates. Therefore, the task of halving poverty rates is much harder for a country like Tanzania that starts from a higher incidence rate than for a country like Thailand with a much lower poverty rate. The implication is that individual countries should not be assessed with respect to the MDG targets but instead to some nationally-set targets that take into account initial conditions and what takes to reach a particular poverty reduction or health improvement objective. A similar point is made by

Clemens et al. (2007), who are concerned that many African countries will miss most targets despite substantial progress by historical standards. Part of the problem, they argue, lies in the expectations raised by the MDG agenda and the failures of MDG costing exercises which have created the false impression that enhanced financial assistance, hence renewed aid commitments to fund MDGs, was enough to help reach the ambitious targets. In fact, many of these costing exercises were too simple and approximate and did not consider the range of broader changes and transformations needed to sustain progress towards the attainment of MDGs, particularly in countries starting from very unfavourable initial conditions.

Third, there is asymmetry in the way the various goals and targets are established and how progress is measured. Easterly (2009) argues that African countries are less likely to achieve MDG targets to a large extent because of the arbitrary choices made in assessing "success" or "failure" for the various goals. This is partly because targets are put either in terms of percentage changes (poverty reduction), or as level-end targets (education targets), meaning in both cases that African countries start with an obvious disadvantage, which obscures their achievements, especially in the long-term. In addition some targets are set in terms of negative indicators (poverty, people without access to clean water) while others are set as positive indicators (education targets). The fact remains that African countries, despite their resource constraints and the broadly negative impact of structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s and 1990s, have made very substantial progress in economic and social indicators since Independence, particularly impressive between 1960 and 1980 (Sender, 1999; Oya, 2007).

Fourth, MDGs are limited to a set of social welfare measures over a relatively limited time period of 25 years. Most goals relate to the state of human health and education. Some of these depend on specific social policies and interventions but they also depend on the characteristics of development processes, understood as processes of structural (economic and social) transformations, rising living standards and economic growth. These are processes that have taken generations to achieve similar results in many of today's developed countries and most fast-transforming developing societies. The MDG agenda, which contains a very broad objective such as poverty reduction, has nothing to say about these long-term socio-economic processes and their complexities. In fact, the MDG agenda can be seen as part of a broader new aid agenda more or less centred around the notion of "poverty reduction" as ultimate universal goal. In this sense, it forms part of the new aid and poverty reduction agendas, which consist of three broad pillars: a focus on market-led growth, governance and social development (understood as improvements in human capital) (see Mkandawire, 2010).

In sum, the MDG and poverty reduction agendas have come with two serious costs. First, diverteding attention from debates and ideas about the long-term features and contradictions of "development" as a process of change. Second, the focus on final outcomes, which may require generations to be achieved in many cases means that little guidance is given about how to achieve those outcomes through development strategies that must coherently combine economic and social policies. To this point I turn in the next section.

4. Poverty Reduction vs Development: What's Missing from the MDG Agenda in Africa.

Is there a *contradiction* between aiming to achieve poverty reduction and "development"? No. History teaches us that poverty reduction is an integral part of processes of economic and social development, both as a consequence and a cause. In fact, an analysis of the most rapid economic transformations of the late twentieth century, e.g. China and Southeast Asia, shows that the recorded rates of poverty reduction have been unprecedented. Lessons from history could usefully be drawn upon to inform a less narrow poverty reduction agenda. However, the dominance of cross-country growth regression analysis without sufficient theoretical content has led many mainstream economists to defend a simple one-to-one causal link between economic growth and poverty reduction to conclude that only growth matters, in a trivialised "trickle-down" economics (for example, Dollar and Kraay, 2002). Other mainstream economists have instead argued that growth is absent in the MDG and poverty reduction agenda and that SSA's basic problem is just lack of growth (Collier, 2007). However, there is huge variation beyond the averages, which makes any simplistic statement on the relationship between growth and poverty reduction inadequate (Wade, 2004; Ravallion, 2001). By oversimplifying the relationship between poverty and growth, both poverty and growth have been somewhat trivialised.

4.1. False Precision in Poverty Data.

First, there is broad consensus that poverty is complex and multidimensional. Indeed, one could argue that a number of MDGs, such as reductions in hunger, infant mortality rates and improvements in access to education, are all aspects of a poverty reduction goal. However, poverty reduction appears as a separate goal. This requires a specific target, which shows the dramatic methodological leap from a multidimensional conceptualisation of poverty to a one-dimension empirical operationalization. Poverty is reduced mainly to one indicator, the poverty headcount index, which only tells us the proportion of population that lives below an international poverty line, defined in terms of individual monetary consumption expenditure. In a way, this signals the massive influence that the World Bank has had on the MDG agenda, despite the latter being generally perceived as a product of UN and NGO lobbying (Casse and Jensen, 2009). There are two main problems with this approach. First, there is a danger of falling into a syndrome of "false precision" whereby small changes in poverty rates are taken as important events, despite the large margin of unquantifiable error. The political stakes in poverty measurement are indeed very high. However, poverty indicators based on an international poverty line rely on a chain of assumptions and errors that are hard to quantify to make sense of poverty trends. The calculation of poverty lines is marred by arbitrariness and approximation in: purchasing power parity exchange rates; comparability of consumption baskets across countries; and calculation of price indices (Reddy, 2008; Deaton, 2001). Likewise, data on consumption expenditure are fraught with non-sampling errors (e.g. it is very hard to accurately quantify food consumption in poor countries) and lack of comparability between surveys, which makes the interpretation of trends an exercise of dubious precision. Second, a focus on dubious poverty data makes the empirics of growth-poverty linkages particularly problematic, especially when it is reduced to very simplistic and vague propositions, such as "growth is good for the poor", or that pro-poor growth requires better "integration" of the poor in growth processes. Part of the problem is the focus on the proximate causes of poverty, which is not equivalent to tackling its underlying structural causes (Mkandawire, 2010: 45).

4.2. No Growth and No Development Strategies.

Second, the simplification, rather than the absence, of economic growth lies at the heart of flaws in the current poverty reduction agenda. Mkandawire (2010: 46) has boldly argued that the dominant poverty reduction strategy "actually had no growth strategy other than the belief it would logically follow from stabilization and liberalization policies". MDGs and the poverty agenda are silent about sectoral policies. Industrialization as one of the historical features of development processes then and now is simply ignored. Technological catching up that is so central to convergence stories in advanced capitalist countries and in late industrializers seems to play little role in economic and social improvements. The macroeconomics of income distribution and its impact on capital accumulation, a major driver of growth under capitalism, which was so central to the pioneering work of development thinkers like Kaldor and Hirschman is a thing of the past. The transformation of agriculture and social relations in the countryside that have taken so long to mature in capitalist economies is not reflected in static approaches that dream of a poverty reduction process primarily centred on increasing the productivity of smallholder farmers, thus ignoring key lessons from history. The word 'capitalism' is indeed missing in most MDG debates. The absence of direct focus on basic aspects of economic infrastructure is also significant given the dependence of MDG achievements on fundamental infrastructural development. As Bayliss and McKinley (2009: 1) argue, African countries "have made even less progress on providing access to electricity, which is the basis for reaching many MDGs, such as the education and health goals." Moreover, the idea underpinning the

MDG agenda that aid can engineer processes of social, political and economic change is naïve. Clemens et al. (2007: 738) point out that "massive poverty reduction in China through forces entirely unrelated to aid intervention has little relevance to what donors must do for Africa". More importantly, the poverty reduction experienced in China and many other Asian countries has been possible through policy regimes that do not resemble the policy mix associated with the Washington and the post-Washington consensus, which were closely linked to aid flows to Africa since the 1980s. All the ingredients of the development process mentioned above are not simple "trickle-down" economics and are the result of complex political and social bargaining (Gore, 2010: 76). In sum, the poverty reduction agenda underpinning the MDGs has contributed to the fall of "grand narratives" of development and the demise of the idea of "development" as understood in the traditions of old development economics and political economy of development.

4.3. The Neglect of Employment.

Third, it is hard to conceive of a strategy that aims to put poverty reduction and growth at the centre of the development agenda without a serious treatment of employment and labour markets in developing countries. However, all the efforts made to produce data on poverty are mirrored by a sore neglect of the collection of labour statistics, especially in poor countries. The employment nexus in the growth-poverty linkage is generally secondary in the mainstream literature, while a focus on self-employment and assets for the 'poor' dominates the policy agenda (Sender, 2003). The only reference to employment in the MDG agenda appears as a target under MDG1 and in mostly vague and aspirational terms as "achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people", without any specific date. It describes a general statement of intent that belies any faith in the achievement of full decent employment in developing countries. Amsden (2010) has stressed that the currently dominant poverty reduction paradigm suffers from "dementia over jobs" and believes that "a supply of better clothed, housed, and fed workers automatically creates the demand to employ it at a living wage", a sort of naïve Say's law of employment (Amsden, 2010: 60). Amsden's view means that a focus on employment from the demand side perhaps requires a top-down approach to poverty reduction that sees the increase in large-scale paid factory employment through sustainable business enterprises. Therefore, "employment generation is different from poverty alleviation because it has a concept behind it, 'capital'", and poverty reduction cannot happen on a sustainable basis outside capital accumulation in a capitalist economy. To conclude, the adoption of the MDGs and the poverty alleviation agenda ultimately reflects what Reinert (2007) calls 'palliative economics', where 'instead of attacking the sources of poverty from the inside through the production system – which is what development economics used to be about – the symptoms are addressed by throwing money at them from the outside' (p. 240).

5. What This Special Issue Contains.

This special issue contains five articles that aim to critically dissect the situation and challenges related to some of the leading objectives in the MDG agenda. All the articles share some of the scepticism shown in this article about the usefulness and relevance of the MDG agenda for Africa and highlight some of the most obvious gaps and contradictions in such agenda as well as the issues that would require greater attention to take the MDGs more seriously. In order to bring some empirical depth into this analysis, we have opted to ask authors to focus on particular MDGs, considering the ones that are particularly important for human improvement in Sub-Saharan Africa and those that raise more questions.

There is thus a deliberate focus on health-related MDGs, since these are perhaps the ones which may be seen as particularly reflecting the MDG spirit. In addition, it is precisely with respect to health-related targets that less progress has been made globally (World Bank and IMF, 2010). In fact, the role of aid and international assistance in helping to achieve health-related outcomes cannot be denied and much progress can be attained in these issues even in contexts where economic growth and development are sluggish. In other words, improvements in health outcomes in developing countries can be seen as global public goods. Three papers discuss issues and challenges related to the fight against hunger, disease and mortality. One article provides a critical assessment of MDG agendas and targets on education. The paper focuses on some specific myths underlying the education MDGs. Finally, an article focuses on one of the least publicised and debated MDGs, i.e. MDG 7 on environmental sustainability. This is an important objective in itself but also, for the purposes of the debate in this special issue, for the contradictions that it raises.

The article on education targets by Deborah Johnston engages with but goes beyond the exercise of questioning education goals as "magic bullets". The paper recognises that an extremely rapid improvement in educational enrolments over the long-term with some acceleration in recent years have been achieved in most SSA countries. However, it aims to focus attention on two myths underlying education MDGs. First, it shows that the evidence on the benefits of basic education in Sub-Saharan Africa belie a focus on universal primary education (UPE). Her point is linked to the arguments above on the neglect of employment in the MDG agenda. Johnston argues that a "positive impact of education depends on two things: the profile of those who are able to access education of different levels; and, importantly, the manner in which the labour market is impacted by wider trade and industrial policy". Therefore, the creation of employment opportunities must be coherent with or even an integral part of any education policy.

Karlos Pérez de Armiño paints a bleak picture about the fight against hunger. He stresses in particular the extent to which the recent food crisis, likely to be repeated in 2011, has only exacerbated deep-rooted structural problems in the global food system and in production conditions in Africa that result in high levels of undernutrition and recurrent episodes of hunger. Although recognising the role of the MDG agenda to mobilise more resources to tackle hunger in poor countries, the author lists several reasons why the MDG agenda may be somewhat regressive and ineffective. For example, targets are conservative and the fight against hunger and undernutrition is not tackled on the basis of a human rights approach, rather following a market- and aid-induced model. Moreover, there are contradictions between the connivance of the MDG agenda with neoliberal approaches to poverty reduction and growth and the negative impact that neoliberal policies have had on the nutrition situation of many SSA countries. The article suggests that the kind of "political will" embedded in the MDG agenda is not enough and that insufficient aid commitments reflect the gap between rhetoric and policy.

Woodhouse engages with the goals on environmental sustainability and interrogates their contradictions with broader objectives to reduce poverty and hunger. In fact, insofar as undernutrition is generally expected to be tackled through increase in agricultural production, the MDG agenda seems to ignore potential contradictions with a commitment to maintenance of forested areas and conservation of water resources. Increasingly in SSA this means a need for agricultural intensification, calling for a new Green Revolution, which would require important water resources. However, the longstanding neglect of public investments in irrigation is now compounded by recent trends that are intensifying competition for land and water for agriculture.

Finally, two articles engage with debates on the attainment of MDGs in health. A lot of attention and efforts are placed on these targets but both articles suggest that aid commitments still fall short of enormous needs. Both papers stress the significant improvements in health outcomes since Independence in most African countries, and the relative slowing down of progress during the structural adjustment era of the 80s and 90s. In this sense, the MDG agenda may have provided a much needed push to increase aid commitments more recently. However, it has failed to provide a coherent strategy and an approach consistent with the heterogeneity in terms of needs and challenges that is now observed within SSA, as both articles argue. Brikci and Holder emphasise that the MDG framework is not one within which equity considerations could be analysed. In line with the arguments on education targets by Johnston, the two authors also point out that the MDG agenda has detracted from the recognition of the importance of social determinants of health and has failed to highlight the interconnectedness of all MDGs, a point also stressed by Pérez de Armiño on undernutrition. The two articles on health targets also share a common concern for the need to strengthen national health systems, to "diagonalise" vertical disease programmes (TB, HIV/AIDS, etc.) and address the chronic lack of human resources at all levels of the health system, which the intervention of aid agencies and NGOs seems to compound.

Overall, this special issue does not dispute in principle the fact that most MDGs and indeed the aim to reduce poverty are *desirable*. A different matter is whether the approach encouraged to meet these targets is adequate, whether the targets are realistic and feasible, and whether integral aspects of the development process may have been dangerously assumed away by the MDG rhetoric and its priorities.

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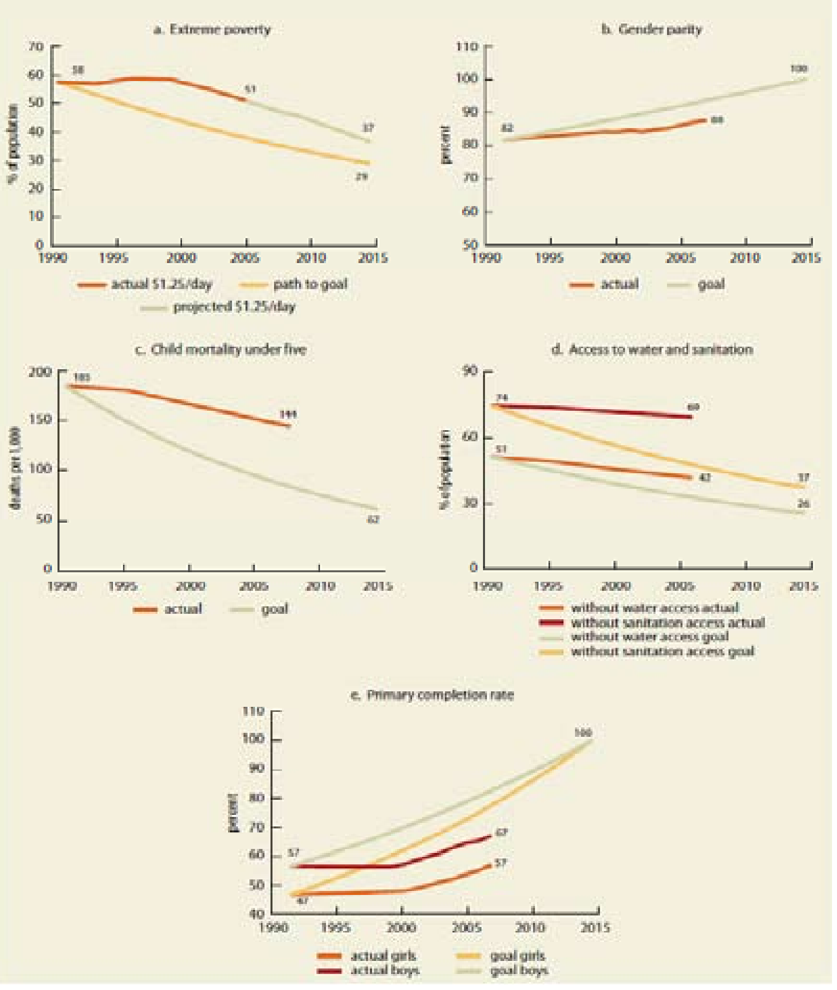
APPENDIX 1.

FIGURE 1: PROGRESS TOWARDS MAIN MDGS IN AFRICA.



Source: World Bank and IMF (2010): *Global Monitoring Report 2010*, Fig. 1.15.