

## **MDGs 2.0 – An Open-sourced Campaign**

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*“We have the means and the capacity to deal with our problems, if only we can find the political will.”*

*Kofi Annan*

The years between now and 2015 will witness some of the toughest campaigning since the explosion in NGO advocacy in the late 1980s. Indeed, from the vantage point of 2015, the last two decades may well be viewed as the “golden years,” times when great progress was made in bringing global debates about poverty to the fore and in achieving concrete results in developing countries. Much was accomplished, but in the present moment, a convergence of critical geo-economic events make action all the more urgent—and all the more difficult. Kofi Anan’s quote on political will is central to the debate on the MDGs: it is not the methods that we lack, but the will of world leaders to act on the global poverty and climate challenges with a sense of urgency.

In the post-2015 framework, no longer will a concise argument with concrete policy options be enough to muster the political will necessary to deliver development goals. Certainly, the past decade has seen a tremendous number of incisive policy analyses and adaptive development frameworks put into a persuasive argument in the global debate. The crucial missing link, however, is a focus on building the momentum needed to create political will to make the tough decisions to move forward on delivering the goals. Future MDGs, MDGs 2.0, need to move beyond a framework of goals to incorporate a built-in campaigning component, one that emphasizes movement and momentum, understand the politics and knows the messaging. Goals and well-thought-out policy outcomes are all very good, but they’re static, unmoving. Without an emphasis on messaging, MDGs will not get the political traction they need to become reality.

This think piece will take the risky line—given the forum’s audience of policy specialists --to argue that what is needed for MDGs 2.0 is actually a lot less policy and a lot more PR.

### **The Evolving Global Scene**

The recent food price increases, the jump in oil prices, and the current global financial crisis all risk putting the issues of poverty and climate change at the back of the global political agenda. Added to this is the emergence of new global groupings which decisions impact the whole world. The rapid rise of the G20 as the new global forum around the financial crisis underlines the shifting nature of global relations created by the crisis. While the G8 was long criticised as an inadequate forum for global decision-making, few thought it would be made obsolete so quickly. More worrying, new emerging groups like the G20 heads of state summit threaten to sideline the United Nations as the forum for global decision-making. Like it or not, the UN is no longer deemed a suitable place for intergovernmental negotiations. If currently trends continue, it will become a marginal player in the global scene.

It is the rise of the new players in the global scenario that will create the greatest challenges for the world community to deliver concrete changes concerning poverty and climate change. Trying to get the G8, a group composed mainly of democracies with substantial international development agendas and budgets, to agree on addressing sustainable development was difficult enough—and even then we failed to get all the pledges delivered. But trying to achieve these aims with the new players, some of whom are not partial to non-governmental commentary and external pressure, will make the task much more difficult.

Added to this geopolitical change is an apparent retraction in developed countries. The recent financial crisis has been used as an excuse to decrease ODA budgets and to increase protectionist barriers to trade. This year's G8 President, Italy, has decided to slash its ODA budget by 56%. Even the stalwart global development champion, the UK, came within a cat's whisker of reducing its ODA targets.

The global community needs to recognize and grapple with the shifts in language and tone coming from donor governments about poverty reduction and development. In this time of great economic anxiety, donor governments are preparing the public to accept spending cuts in ODA, pandering to internal constituencies by increasing trade barriers, and often using rhetoric that resonates with the rise of nationalism in response to a dwindling job market. ("British jobs for British workers."). All these pressures are very real. The effects of the financial crisis have been felt not only by the poor, even the middle classes have

been hit. Under these circumstances, it's vital that we ensure that the debate in the press does not present the relationship between domestic economic health and poverty reduction in the developing world as a zero-sum calculus.

The next few years will be critical for setting the stage for what is to follow the MDGs in 2015. If the development community does not address head on the language and tone of the global debate, the now slowly momentum will grind to a halt. We will be left with no viable successor to the MDGs.

### **Building on the Success**

Therefore, our message as a global community needs to paint a picture of long term success, accentuating the hard fought advances that have been made and framing recent events in global development, namely the food price crisis and the financial crisis, as short term reversals in poverty reduction. In fact, the past ten years had seen great progress. The campaign to drop the debt and the work in 2005 around the G8 delivered concrete and measurable outcomes: there are a millions more children now attending school as a result of debt cancellation, and ODA spending has increased in many of the developing countries.

The MDG's have underpinned much of this progress. After a rocky start they have managed to become the bedrock of much of the international negotiations and planning. While much of the rhetoric around the MDGs is still just rhetoric, the fact that many corporations use the MDGs as a framework for their social responsibility work and that many NGOs have put the MDGs as the centre of their programmes is a testament to the effectiveness of the MDG design and the work of many of the UN agencies such as the Millennium Development Campaign.

### **We All Have to be Campaigners Now**

The MDGs 1.0 were the result of policy analysis that was desperately needed at the time. By condensing the great number of global priorities into eight goals, the global development community made a remarkable achievement: measurable, quantifiable targets. In the new era, however, the MDG 2.0 must go beyond the policy and focus on the delivery. The designers of the MDGs 2.0 must be campaigners and, dare I say it, PR specialists rather than just policy experts. If we've learned one thing in the last ten years, it's that there is no lack

of information and policy analysis—it's the political will to deliver the targets that's been missing. And, in the current situation, the problem political will is much more pressing. The global community needs a campaign plan that delivers the MDGs. Therefore, the next generation of MDGs need to have the following key components integrated into their designed into the framework.

- **One Narrative – One Message:** Put together a holistic approach to the key issues of the environment and poverty. We need to create a narrative that shows that these issues are not zero-sum relationships. Rather than issue-based groups competing over resources and attention, global community needs to draw on the energy of all the groups and work to hone one simple, powerful message: that these problems are intrinsically connected. Rather than focusing on the scarcity of resources devoted toward individual problems, we need to show that the interconnectedness of these problems mandates an integrated, organic approach, one that emphasizes the interrelated effects of the problems. (And here we could use more policy analysis on the interconnectedness of the issues.) This means that while the next generation MDGs may continue a sectoral approach, the individual elements must be framed as part of an integrated whole. That framing will present a unified message, and also do much to reduce the internal competition that can come from resource competition from the different sectors.
- **Inputs and Outputs:** Any new framework to succeed the MDGs must address the inherent weakness of the original MDGs namely: inputs vs. outputs. So long as only outputs are measured and over a long time frame, there is little chance of igniting the global community around meeting the goals. By concentrating on the inputs and allocating milestones to those targets, can a campaign be designed with the milestone targets ensuring goals are in a campaigning timeframe.
- **A Framework for Collaboration:** The next generation of MDGs must include the global community, beyond the governments, as a partner for implementation. The non-governmental groups later become an integral part of the MDGs, and were instrumental in advocating for their implementation. This collaboration, however, needs to begin earlier, at the design stage. By doing so, the new MDG framework can

effectively deploy the people and resources needed to support the work of the global community in shaping the global agenda in the next few years.

The global community has the people power to draw attention to our issues: global players such as Nobel Peace prize winners, well-known people with a depth of knowledge in these issues, celebrities, former presidents, prime-ministers and other high-ranking elected officials: all support our work. We have the resources, the connections, and the human capital required to deliver a strong message to global leaders and the public. We need to not be afraid of using the means that work best to deliver our agenda to the global public.

- **A Global Situation Room:** The new MDGs must have a central information source—perhaps through partnering with international NGOs—that tracks the milestones and creates a real-time evaluation of the state of the MDGs. We have been improving our ability to coordinate and lobby together, but during the next decade, we will have to be much more effective in sharing knowledge among advocacy networks. We need to know which governments are planning which policies on which global issues and when. We need a global situation room that allows us to mobilize our resources in campaigning and lobbying where there are chances of addressing our issue at the national policy level. This also involves using the new and emerging groupings to our advantage.

### **Getting Ready for 2015**

This is a campaigners perspective on the new MDG framework and lays out the critical elements needed to ensure that new goals have a built in component for delivery. Policy experts may argue that we should instead “build the policy and people will come,” but while this may have worked in Kevin Costner’s *Field of Dreams*, it does not work in reality. MDGs 2.0 must include the call to action of the public and government as part of its framework from the beginning—to the extent that it should drive the framework. Only this way can we develop a development mechanism that people can understand, support, and want to contribute to its delivery.

The next few years will call on us all to work harder and longer to achieve our aims. While all the gloom, desperation, even despair about the solvency of the world financial markets will make campaigning on these global issues appear all the more difficult, it will not be impossible. A new MDG campaign that fully accepts the current reality, that is pragmatic in its approach but still demands the highest of goals of the global community, will give us the tools to ensure we do even better at what we already do well.