

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

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Poverty and Development

When we think of poverty reduction and development, we assume that these have always been inextricably linked. This is not the case. A focus on the problem of poverty was a relatively late entrant onto the development agenda. At the birth of the development age, in the decades following the Second World War, the emphasis of development was very much on states and economies. The dominant frameworks of development at the time (modernisation theory and the dependency critique), while differing in their analysis of the causes of underdevelopment, focused on the need to modernise and industrialise, with economic growth viewed as a key indicator of development success. This growth focus continued as the neoliberal counterrevolution in development economics took hold in the 1970s, particularly as expressed through the mechanism of structural adjustment, though emphasis shifted from the role of states to the role of global markets and the private sector. Insofar as poverty reduction was considered in these growth-focused models, it was seen as an incidental outcome: poverty, conceived largely in terms of a lack of income, was a problem that economic growth would rectify.

From the 1970s, however, the mainstream models came increasingly to be challenged, with the emergence of an array of alternative frameworks concerned with redefining the goals of development, shifting the frame of reference from an economic growth-centred to a poverty- and people-centred focus. Growth, it was argued, was an insufficient indicator of development,

benefiting the few rather than the many and indeed in practice exacerbating the gap between the rich and the poor. From Dudley Seers' (1969) call to move away from national income as an indicator of development to focus instead on issues of poverty, employment and inequality, through the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation's (1975: 7) emphasis on development "of the whole man and woman – and not just the growth of things, which are merely means", the concern with reinserting the human into development became increasingly evident.

As a consequence, the issue of poverty progressively moved to the core of the development agenda, though there continued to be debate as to how poverty should best be defined, and therefore how the needs of the poorest should best be addressed. Two strands were evident. In the first, poverty was increasingly defined in multidimensional terms. In such frameworks, growth was viewed in instrumental terms as a 'means' rather than an 'end', useful for helping to achieve poverty reduction, but not sufficient in and of itself. As Mahbub ul Haq famously commented: "We were taught to take care of our GNP as this will take care of poverty. Let us reverse this and take care of poverty as this will take care of GNP" (Haq 1971: 6). In this vein, the Basic Needs approach, launched in 1976, advocated a focus on "the minimum standard of living which a society should set for the poorest groups of its people" (ILO, 1976: 7), with priority placed on delivering basic necessities (food, clothing, shelter), services (water, sanitation, education, healthcare etc.) and with a practical focus on employment creation in areas in which the poor were represented (e.g. the rural sector). Subsequently, the work of Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen gained significant traction, with his Capabilities Approach (Sen 1985) and subsequent conception of 'development as freedom' (Sen 1999) focusing the lens of inquiry firmly on the human side of development. For Sen, development was about more than consumption of basic human needs. It was about delivering substantive freedoms and eliminating sources of unfreedom (including, for example, poverty, tyranny, social and economic deprivation etc.), a view which brought the fulfilment of human rights to the heart of the development framework.

On these 'alternative' foundations, the UNDP's Human Development Framework (embodied in the associated *Human Development Reports*) was built (UNDP 1990), shaped and framed by the work of Haq and Sen, and contextualised within an expanding understanding of the multidimensional causes of poverty, and constraints on the poor. Gender, ethnicity, age, disability, education, security and a range of other factors were now increasingly seen as part of the poverty equation.

As this multidimensional and human-focused view became prominent, however, a far more limited framework also gained traction from the 1990s. This second strand, originating in

the World Bank and utilised in its *World Development Report*, focused on those living in extreme poverty, defined using the economic measure of an income of less than \$1 per day (subsequently revised to \$1.25 in 2008 and \$1.90 in 2015). This provided an easily understandable yardstick, and for this reason has proved popular both in relation to anti-poverty campaigns, and with those advocating economic growth models of development.

Neither of these strands, however, is without its problems. Multidimensional conceptualisations of poverty, by their very expansiveness, may prove difficult to operationalise, and suffer criticism as to the appropriateness of specific targets selected. On the other hand, the ‘dollar a day’ measure is extremely simplistic. It raises questions as to the appropriateness of poverty lines, and its failure to address distributional issues (in other words, inequality). It also suffers the problem that, while simple to understand, it is very difficult to measure, being subject to a large margin of error. Nevertheless, it is on these two strands that the vision of poverty reduction embodied in the *Sustainable Development Goals* (and indeed in their predecessor, the *Millennium Development Goals*) has been built. The SDGs are, in effect, an attempt to operationalise these views of poverty.

Goals and Targets

Goals and targets, as noted above, have posed significant difficulty in relation to poverty reduction. The *Millennium Development Goals*, launched in 2000, set out 8 goals and 21 targets, but were from the outset subject to criticism. The rather limited number of goals and targets were seen by many as something of a lowest common denominator framework, ignoring or underemphasising a range of issues significant to poverty and the poor, including political rights, gender and so on. Compounding this, while applying to the developing world, developing countries themselves had played very little part in formulating the Goals, leading to accusations that the MDGs were a top-down imposition reflecting donor interests rather than developing world needs. The creation of the *Sustainable Development Goals* saw an effort to rectify these shortcomings. Composition was a far more expansive and complex process, avoiding the top-down approach of the MDGs and addressing to a great extent the consequent issue of ownership. Additionally, and partially as a result of this, there are far more goals and targets – 17 goals and 169 targets – covering a broader range of issues. Finally, the SDGs are conceived as ‘universal goals’, applying as much to the developed as the developing world.

When it comes to poverty, this change in approach is evident. Within the SDG framework, poverty remains (as with the MDGs) the headline goal to which all other goals contribute: when it comes to poverty elimination, the 17 SDGs are fundamentally interlinked, a

recognition of the multidimensionality of poverty and the array of factors that impact upon it. However, where MDG 1 had three targets relating to extreme poverty, employment and hunger, under the more expansive SDGs, each of these targets has become a separate goal. This separation, alongside the expansiveness of the SDGs, has resulted in a more granular approach to each goal, poverty included. SDG 1 focuses on five aspects: extreme poverty according to an international poverty line (SDG 1.1), poverty according to national poverty lines (SDG 1.2), social protection systems (SDG 1.3), gender equal access to resources (SDG 1.4) and resilience (SDG 1.5) (see Table 1). In addition to the interlinkage with other SDGs, this offers a more multidimensional approach to the issue of eliminating poverty. Finally, SDG 1 also recognises the incidence and significance of poverty in the developed world: targets 1.2 to 1.5 are issues relevant to populations regardless of geography.

Table 1: SDG vs MDG Poverty Targets

SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere	MDG 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
1.1 By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day [measure revised to \$1.90 a day]	1A Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people living on less than \$1.25 a day
1.2 By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions	1B Achieve Decent Employment for Women, Men, and Young People
1.3 Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable	1C Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger
1.4 By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance	
1.5 By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters	

While something of a step beyond the MDGs, the SDG 1 targets are still characterised by a range of problems. First, notwithstanding the goal to ‘end poverty in all its forms everywhere’, the targets themselves make it clear that this aspiration relates only to extreme poverty, with SDG 1.2 simply aiming to ‘reduce at least by half’ the proportion of people below national poverty lines. Second, targets relating to national poverty lines (SDG 1.2) and social protection systems (1.3) utilise a metric of national appropriateness, suggesting the possibility of significant variation in the extent to which such targets are delivered. The accident of geography, in other words, will go some distance in determining the range of development outcomes possible for individuals, regardless of the professed universality of the *Sustainable Development Goals* themselves. If, as is increasingly recognised, development is a process of the fulfilment of fundamental human rights, then such variation becomes questionable.

Progress

We cannot yet say whether the SDGs have delivered a shift from progress under the MDGs (the actual impact of which is also far from clear [see e.g. Pogge 2013]) – they are only three years old, and the data is yet to catch up. The most frequently cited statistics relate to extreme poverty according to the international poverty line of \$1.90 per day (SDG 1.1). A new report from the World Bank (to be released in October 2018) provides data for 2015, estimating 736 million people to be living below the international poverty line, a reduction from 1.9 billion in 1990 (when figures were first collected) and 1.6 billion in 2002 (following the launch of the MDGs). A couple of points are, however, worth making. First, much of this reduction has been the result of rapid economic growth in China, lifting more than 700 million people out of extreme poverty. With that achieved, the rate of global poverty reduction has slowed somewhat, from a 2.5 per cent drop between 2011 and 2013 to 1.2 percent between 2013 and 2015 (World Bank 2018b: 1), and is predicted to further decline to less than half a per cent for the period through to 2030 (4). Confidence nevertheless remains high that the SDG target will be achieved. Second, the global distribution of those living in extreme poverty has shifted as some areas have done better than others. From a concentration in East Asia in the 1990s, the highest incidence of poverty shifted to South Asia in 2002 and Sub-Saharan Africa by 2010. An increase in the numbers living in extreme poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa meant that, by 2015, that region accounted for more than half of the global total (413 million). In this respect, Sub-Saharan Africa also offers an insight into the difficulty of using targets focused on proportions of the population: while between 2013 and 2015 the proportion of those living in extreme poverty in the region declined from 42.5 to 41.1

per cent, the number of people living in extreme poverty increased by 8 million (2 per cent) (World Bank 2018a), a result of rapid population growth.

Beyond extreme poverty, a paucity of information is evident. Notably, the UN Secretary-General's 2018 SDG progress report (UN 2018a, 2018b) provides no substantive consideration of national poverty lines (SDG 1.2), gender equal access to resources (SDG 1.4) or resilience (SDG 1.5) (beyond citing the global economic cost in 2017 of natural disasters), a consequence of a lack of appropriate data. This is a difficulty that is unlikely soon to be rectified. Social protection systems (SDG 1.3) receive somewhat better treatment, but even here the depth of evidentiary data is limited, with estimates only that 45 per cent of the global population has access to one cash benefit (with pensions the predominant receipt), and with Sub-Saharan Africa (13 per cent) and South Asia (14 per cent) falling at the bottom of the scale (UN 2018b: 8). No consideration is given to the quality of the 'nationally appropriate' social protections provided. Given these statistical issues, and with analysis still largely focused on extreme poverty, it is unclear how the more detailed SDG targets in practice have delivered beyond their more narrowly framed MDG predecessor.

Poverty in European Union Development Policy

The place of poverty in European Union policy largely mirrors that of the broader development debates. Neither the Union's first formal development framework – the 1963 Yaoundé Convention – nor its precursor Articles of Association of the Treaty of Rome mentions poverty, an absence also evident in the EU's early policy documents (European Commission 1971, 1972). It was only through the 1970s that such myopia began to subside, as poverty-focused frameworks increasingly came to the fore. The third Lomé Convention of 1985, for the first time, cited the issue of poverty in the EU's primary development relationship with the African, Caribbean and Pacific states, and by the 1990s, reflecting the evolution of other development actors (the World Bank, IMF etc.), it had become a central focus in the Union's policy approach, a transition formalised with the signature of the Maastricht Treaty on European Union in 1992 which prioritised 'the campaign against poverty' (Art.130u[1]).

In subsequent years, the precise meaning of 'the campaign against poverty' was addressed. A 1993 Communication (European Commission 1993) drew heavily on human-centred alternative approaches, acknowledging the increased emphasis on social, political and institutional aspects of poverty, and highlighting participation and engagement of the poor in social, political and economic life (§20). It directly reflected the framework formalised by the UNDP (1990), recognising both that economic growth, while necessary, is an insufficient

condition for development and poverty reduction (European Commission 1993: §19; UNDP 1990: 11) as well as the importance of viewing human beings as participants in, rather than simply beneficiaries of, development (European Commission 1993: §11; UNDP 1990: 11). This poverty reduction focus, contextualised within the framework of Human Development, became further entrenched in the following years, with the 1996 Council Resolution on *Human and Social Development and European Union Development Policy* (Council of the EU 1996) to an extent completing this transition. The resolution endorsed the people-oriented conception of development (§1), and called for this framework to be centralised in the Union's policy, in terms both of design and implementation of macroeconomic policy and development projects, and in guiding assessments of performance and effectiveness (§3). As the MDGs and SDGs came on-stream, both of which frameworks the Union played a significant role in elaborating, these too became a focus of EU policy, with SDG goals, targets and indicators, for example, central to the 2017 *New European Consensus on Development*.

Notwithstanding the recognition of the universality of the SDGs (Council of the EU *et al.* 2017: §112), given the Union's limited internal policy competence in Member State territories it is perhaps unsurprising that its focus on SDG implementation is largely external, with an emphasis on poverty reduction in least-developed and low income countries. The array of frameworks and processes by which the EU seeks to deliver on poverty reduction targets is too extensive to rehearse here, but it is worth noting that its approach conceives poverty in multidimensional terms with an emphasis on the fulfilment of fundamental human rights. In this respect, the SDGs are viewed as a cross-cutting framework. The European Union's success will be premised on the extent to which it can avoid compartmentalisation of poverty reduction goals, and instead deliver the broader multidimensional and cross-cutting policy responses necessary to achieve substantive progress toward the 2030 poverty targets.

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