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Oswaldo Espinoza  
*California State University, Monterey Bay*

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# FUTURE VS PAST DEVELOPMENT GOALS: THE SDG'S VS THE MDG'S

Oswaldo Espinoza  
GS 401 09 May 2018  
Professor Harris, Professor Abraham

Oswaldo Espinoza

Professor Harris, Abraham

GS 401

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## Future VS Past Development Goals: The SDG's VS the MDG's

### *Introduction*

Millennium Development Goals or MDG's are goals with measurable targets and deadlines that are aimed to improve the lives of the world's poorest people. These goals were reached by all 191 United Nations member states at that time and by about twenty national organizations at the United Nations Millennium Summit in the year 2000. There are a total of seven MDG's, eight if you count the international one as well. Within these eight goals there are a total of twenty-one targets, ultimately these goals and targets aim to reduce poverty as much as possible. The time span given to when these goals and targets are supposed to be met is fifteen years, from 2000 to 2015 (Clemens, Moss 2005). The major players contributing to these eight goals are the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and many other bi-lateral aid agencies. By setting these goals and targets, the United Nations has used them as motivational devices for a greater development effort in and for all the poorer countries around the world. However, for the most part the MDG's are poorly designed to measure progress on a lot of their goals. As a result, the way they are designed makes Africa look like it is doing a lot worse than it actually is, compared to nearby countries and other countries around the world.

The seventh MDG, which relates to environmental protection, had a lot of targets that weren't achieved and in some cases these targets have been negatively impacted by policies and actions which aim to achieve other goals. This leads us into the newer and current Sustainable Development Goals or SDG's. The SDG's cover a much broader range of issues than the MDG's

did and are much more applicable to all countries, not just developing countries. As a whole, they are a more integrated system than the MDG's were, this in turn makes it possible to facilitate policy integration across sectors. The SDG's were introduced at the RIO+20 Conference, which was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil during June from the thirteenth to the twenty-second in 2012 (Sachs 2012). Although this is when they were introduced, it took over a year of intergovernmental work from the United Nations along with member states to finalize these new goals and targets. The time span they came up with for when all these goals and targets are to be achieved is fifteen years, from 2015 to 2030. There is a total of seventeen goals and within these goals there are 169 targets, all aimed at solving as many sustainable development issues as possible.

The years I've been attending college, issues that tend to come up year after year are poverty and the environment. Over time my interest in these topics grew and led me to what I am writing about today, the MDG's and the SDG's. As goals that aim to eradicate both poverty and environmental issues, I believe the SDG's will benefit countries more overall than the MDG's did. My paper will include two major parts, in the first I will be going over the MDG's and how each one specifically causes a disadvantage towards Africa. In the second part I will jump to the SDG's and how they tie and correlate with each other, including how they fix a major problem that hindered the MDG's. Following that will be my theoretical framework along with my methodology. After the methodology I will include my analysis and findings, where I explain how the theories I've chosen are relevant to the findings I've made through my research. Finally, I will end my paper with a conclusion that summarizes all my concluding thoughts and opinions on the MDG's and SDG's. I have integrated my review of the literature onto the body of this report since my research topic made this necessary.

### *MDG's and Their Disadvantages Towards Africa*

The first MDG is to cut the world's poverty rate in half by 2015. Poverty rates are very different from country to country, so you can't really target a relative equal change or goal across all countries. For example, one country's poverty rates may be at ten percent while another country's poverty rates may be at fifty percent, cutting them in half will still leave one country with a much higher poverty rate than the other. Also, a goal of reducing poverty rates places a lot of value on growth that moves an individual from below to above the absolute poverty line. However, it places no value on growth that increases the income of those people still below the poverty line. Another thing is the per capita income a country has, the higher a country's per capita income the easier it is to reach this particular MDG. If a country starts these MDG's with a low per capita income it is going to take more growth of mean income for that country to reach the same percentage reduction in poverty than a country with a high per capita income to begin with. Fun fact, out of all the countries or regions participating in the MDG's, Africa has the lowest per capita income. In other words, it was the most disadvantaged to reach this goal from the start. Also, as Conceicao, Mukherjee, and Nayyar mention in their article, the economic crisis possibly had long-term consequences for human development and achieving the MDG's in Africa as well, specifically with this goal. (Conceicao et al., 2011).

The second MDG is to attain universal primary enrollment by 2015. The problem with this MDG is that it targets an end-goal rather than a change-goal. This creates a bias for the country starting the farthest away from the absolute goal, which is 100 percent enrollment by 2015. The country starting the farthest away in this case, again, is Africa. In his article, Easterly mentions this very clearly, "Hence, no matter how fast the progress of African countries or how remarkable the increase relative to Western historical norms or contemporary developing

countries experience, Africa will fail to meet the second MDG if it fails to pass this finish line” (Easterly 2007). The truth is that African countries have actually expanded their primary enrollment a lot faster than western countries have in the last 5 decades. Non-African countries started at about eighty percent of gross primary enrollment rate and have since gone up about twenty-five to thirty percent (this is based on a gross primary enrollment rate chart going up to 110 percent, shown in the *findings* section below). On the other hand, African countries started at about thirty percent of gross primary enrollment rate and have improved a whole sixty to sixty-five percent. However, instead of being praised for their improvements they are only recognized as a failure for not being on track to meet the goal of 100 percent by 2015. If these MDG’s were worded differently, Africa would be looked at in a whole different light. The way they are worded now, no matter how fast African countries continue to improve, Africa will continue to be looked down on and fail to meet these MDG’s.

The third MDG is gender equality. The problem here is that gender equality will be measured by ratios of boys to girls in primary and secondary schools. Millions and millions of children in the ages between primary and secondary schooling do not even go to school, with the highest numbers coming from Africa and South Asia. Again, like the second goal, this MDG is also set as an absolute target ratio of 100 percent ratio of boys to girls in primary and secondary schools. Easterly argues that this goal of gender equality in primary education is redundant if the second MDG is achieved. The second goal calls for universal primary enrollment, obviously if all boys and girls are in primary school, there will be gender equality in primary schooling. So, seeing as these two goals are so similar, pretty much connected, Africa is sure to fail two of the MDG’s right off the bat. Even if Africa has shown massive improvement in this MDG, at the end of the day all they announce is that they failed to meet this goal as well.

The fourth MDG is to reduce the child mortality rate by a total of two thirds. Africa has shown steady decrease in child mortality rate since the 1960's up to today, however their child mortality percentages still result in much higher percentages than percentages in other countries. According to the World Bank's World Development Indicator, in 1960 Africa's child mortality rate was at 260, in 2005 that number went down to 140. Of the countries that began above Africa's benchmark in 1990, only eleven percent of them reached the goal of reducing child mortality rate by two-thirds. In other words, a goal of proportional reduction is more likely to be met by countries that began with a low child mortality rate. While a goal of absolute reduction would have been more likely to be reached by countries that began with a high child mortality rate. This is another weakness of the MDG's, "For instance, when a particular country lowers its child mortality rate, then MDG 4 does not capture whether this is due to improvements in the health of the most disadvantaged, i.e. with the highest probability of their children dying before age 5 or others that are better off in terms of child survival" (Loewe 2012). Since this goal was stated in terms of proportional reduction and since Africa was the region with the highest mortality rate to begin with, once again they were the country that was less likely to meet this goal.

The fifth MDG is reducing maternal mortality by two-thirds over the trends that they had in 1990. The sixth MDG is fighting AIDS, TB, and malaria. MDG's five and six go hand in hand, however it is very hard to keep track of the statistics of these MDG's because of the inconsistency from certain sources, so a lot of times they are unreliable anyway. For example, most of the official agencies monitoring the MDG's present no time series data on maternal mortality and the prevalence of AIDS. Another thing is that a lot of the graphs that are shown about maternal mortality and HIV prevalence show the levels of these subjects. However, these

graphs make no difference on whether any country is on track to meeting the fifth or sixth MDG. Those graphs show the levels while these goals ask for the trends in maternal mortality and HIV prevalence. A lot of these sources are so inconsistent that the UN refuses to use them on their own reports of the MDG's. However, through Africa Renewal (which is a UN website) I managed to find some information in regards to these two goals, "Even though the goal of reducing maternal mortality has seen the least progress, remarkable gains were recorded in North Africa, where the share of women who saw a skilled health worker at least once during pregnancy increased by 70 per cent. In sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion of urban women who received antenatal care at least once increased from 84 per cent in 1990 to 89 per cent in 2008. The corresponding proportions for rural women were 55 to 66 per cent, indicating that coverage has improved at a faster pace in the countryside" (Renewal 2010). After everything, even when the majority of this data is considered to be unreliable, Africa is still said to be on track to fail this MDG too.

The seventh MDG is to reduce the proportion of the world without clean water by half and also includes achieving significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million people living in slums. This MDG is stated in terms of a negative indicator, percent of the population WITHOUT clean water, although the statistic that is reported in the World Bank's World Development Indicators and that has been used for many years in development work is the positive indicator of percent WITH clean water (Easterly 2007). Whether Africa is converging compared to other regions depends entirely on whether you look at percent WITH clean water or percent WITHOUT clean water. Percentage changes are higher when a country starts from a lower base, so if we were to look at percentage WITHOUT clean water, it would favor other countries or regions. As opposed to if we were to look at percentage WITH clean water, it would



favor Africa. So, you can see the trouble with measuring the success of Africa in this MDG as well. The eighth MDG, if you decide to count it or not, is to develop a global partnership for development. This goal I think ties in more with the SDG's rather than with the MDG's.

In short, the MDG's were a major breakthrough. For the most part they provided a set of straightforward and concrete goals that were easy to understand and measure with a clear deadline (Attaran 2005). They brought a much larger awareness to poverty worldwide and rekindled the development issues in many countries. Some goals that are particularly worth focusing on are the first and second MDG's. Which are eradicating extreme poverty and attaining universal primary enrollment, "The number of people now living in extreme poverty has declined by more than half, falling from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 836 million in 2015 and the number of people in the working middle class living on more than \$4 a day nearly tripled between 1991 and 2015. The number of out-of-school children of primary school age worldwide fell by almost half, to an estimated 57 million in 2015, down from 100 million in 2000." (The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015).

Even though great progress was attained, most developing countries still did not reach a lot of the goals, "The vast majority of developing countries will miss most of the MDG targets in 2015. Nearly all African countries will miss most of them. But this will not be a sign that poor countries have failed, or that aid has been a waste. Nor will it primarily be because donors did not spend the right amount of money. At the same time, many of the world's poorest countries will in all likelihood make great progress in improving the quality of life of their people—and aid will almost certainly have played a part" (Clemens, Moss 2005). However, they also had many weaknesses. They really only focus on poverty and development eradication, the goals are very isolated from one another, and some goals only focus on outputs or inputs rather than

outcomes of development. Apart from these disadvantages, the poor in Africa are the majority. While in other countries the poor and marginalized are the minority, this is a big factor that comes into play as well (Handoussa 2009).

### ***The Improved SDG's***

Moving on to the SDG's, here are the seventeen goals. The first is to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. The second, to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. Third, to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. Fourth, to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Fifth, to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Sixth is to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. Seventh, to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all. Eighth, to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Ninth is to build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation. Tenth is to reduce inequality within and among countries. Eleventh, to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Twelfth, to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. Thirteenth, to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. Fourteenth is to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. Fifteenth, protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss. Sixteenth, to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. And the seventeenth goal is to revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

All of these goals are interconnected with each other to at least two or more of the other goals through their targets, some of these goals make connections with more than others. This is an enormous difference from the MDG's, "Since 2000, the MDGs have focused on reducing extreme poverty in developing countries. But pursuing a post-2015 agenda focused only on poverty alleviation could undermine the agenda's purpose. Growing evidence and real-world changes convincingly show that humanity is driving global environmental change and has pushed us into a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene" (Griggs 2013). These goals and targets reflect the objective of better integration across sectors, they can be seen as a network in which links among goals exist through targets that explicitly refer to multiple goals. The objective is to show where links between goals were made by the political process that created the SDG's. The presence in the set of SDG's as targets that refer to multiple goals and sectors can make integration and policy coherence across sectors a lot easier, especially at the level of international development agencies.

The goals that are connected to the highest number of other goals are goals number twelve (ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns), ten (reduce inequality within and among countries), one (end poverty in all its forms everywhere) and eight (promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all). Goal number twelve is connected to a total of fourteen other goals, goal ten is connected to twelve other goals, goal one is connected to ten other goals and goal eight is also connected to ten other goals. The goals that are connected to the lowest number of other goals are goals number fourteen (conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development), nine (build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation) and seven (ensure access to affordable, reliable,

sustainable and modern energy for all). Goal number fourteen is only connected to a total of two other goals and goals number nine and seven are both only connected to three other goals each (Le Blanc 2015). The goals connected to the highest number of other goals are obviously goals that are more popular and approachable seeing as they connect to so many of the other goals, however, the goals that are connected to the least number of other goals are also very important and should be in no way neglected.

Looking at the SDG's as a system makes the targets that link two or more of the goals much clearer. These targets reflect the recognition by the international community of the importance of links among these goals. Some argue that this shows the biggest difference from other approaches in the past, like the MDG's, and they're right. The existence of these targets makes what could have been a collection of unrelated goals a system. In a sense, it grounds the political work that the SDG's represent firmer into a reality that is full of trade-offs and interdependences. This in turn makes some of these goals and targets much more difficult to achieve, it makes it harder for them to reach certain requirements like measurability, simplicity and other criteria that are often put forward in the evaluation literature.

The links these goals have through their targets may also make it easier for real mainstreaming of dimensions that used to suffer from not having strong sectoral anchoring in development institutions, such as sustainable consumption and production. Sustainable consumption and production or SCP, has been identified as a key part of sustainable development paths (Le Blanc 2015). SDG number twelve has strong connections with SCP, but for a long time SCP was rarely integrated with other areas and was usually just considered as an add-on. However, as the SDG's stand, actors across many sectors will have no choice but to work with SCP because they're connected to so many of these goals and targets.

So, can the SDG's mend some of the disadvantages that the MDG's brought to Africa? Will the SDG's benefit countries more overall than the MDG's did? I believe they can, one of the biggest disadvantages of the MDG's was that their goals for the most part were very isolated from one another. This resulted in isolated policies that did not make links across different areas clear. The SDG's heavily outweigh the number of goals and targets that the MDG's had. Resulting in a whole network of goals and targets that are connected and linked to one another. This in turn, makes it easier for developing countries like Africa to accomplish more of the goals and targets. In addition, the SDG's are a much broader set of goals that focus more on both poverty and environmental issues going on in our world today. This is stated perfectly in the article written by Hajer and his colleagues, "The SDGs also constitute an important opportunity to move beyond the development agenda of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) towards a universally relevant agenda that integrates social, economic and environmental goals, and includes targets for both developed and developing countries" (Hajer et al, 2015).

### ***Theoretical Framework and Methodology***

I have three theoretical frameworks, they are the basic needs approach (for MDG's), sustainability theory (for SDG's) and the concept of the third way. The basic needs approach is one of the major and more popular approaches which looks into the measurement of absolute poverty in developing countries. The aim of this approach is to define the absolute minimum resources necessary for a long-term physical well-being, this is usually done in terms of consumption goods (Reader 2006). This ties in perfectly with the MDG's because every single one of their goals one way or another has to do with poverty in developing countries and how to help them overcome that poverty. Sustainability theory in a nutshell basically states that world development meets the needs we have in the present without risking in any way the ability of

future generations to meet their own needs (Jenkins 2005). Some examples of sustainable development include wind energy, solar energy, crop rotation, sustainable construction and the list just goes on and on. Sustainability theory fits in perfectly with my paper as well as I look at how the SDG's work off of the MDG's to try and build a brighter future that does not put our ecology at risk.

The concept of the third way refers to the prevailing social-democratic standpoints and policies in Western Europe and the US in the second half of the 1990s. It represents the search for a middle ground between socialism and the Washington Consensus' neoliberal guidelines (Guney-Frahm 2018). Although it is not specifically pointed out, there are many aspects and imprints of the third way in the human development approach, which was used to shape the international development agenda ever since the 1990's. The concept of the third way is a perfect fit for my paper because it deals with aspects such as institutional changes, socio-economic strategies, responses to climate change, and environmental risks, which have direct correlation with the MDG's and the SDG's. Of the five levels and units of analysis there are three included in my study. The third level of analysis, which includes governments, institutions, and regimes, in my study are all the governments taking part in the MDG's and SDG's. The fourth level of analysis, which includes supranational entities and international networks, in my study are the United Nations, World Bank, I.M.F, W.H.O., and other supranational entities aiding with these goals. And the fifth level of analysis, which are the MDG's and SDG's themselves. I see them as a global system which connects all these different governments through the same goals they are all trying to achieve.

The sources I used for my research paper are all secondary sources. All the data that I found for my topic was through qualitative methods. The qualitative methods I am using include line

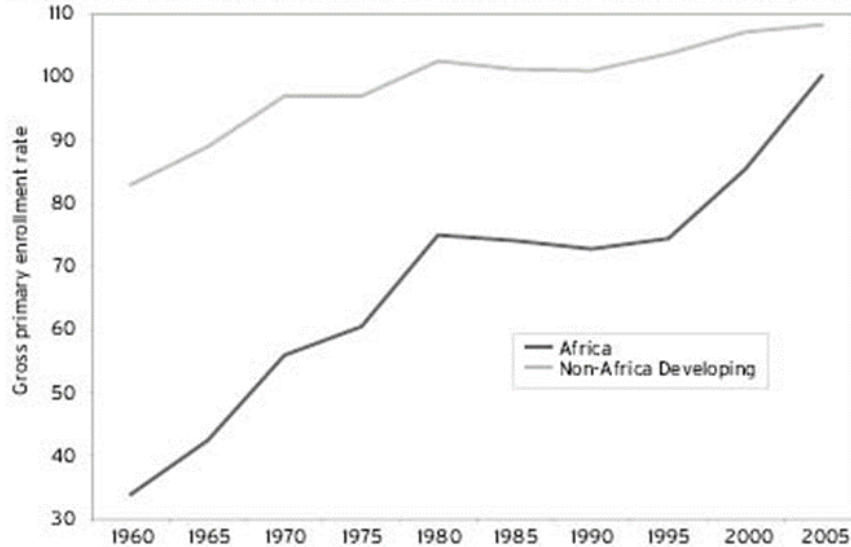
charts that show data comparing male to female enrollment rates in Africa and enrollment rates in general from other countries compared to Africa. A different diagram shows all of the SDG's and their targets in the form of circles and links which show how they are all connected. The rest is from a variety of sources that explain the positives and negatives of the millennium development goals, the sustainable development goals and a few that compare both the MDG's and the SDG's to each other. The method of analysis I will be using on this paper is Synchronic, I will be looking at how the MDG's hinder Africa more than they help compared to every other country taking part in these goals and how the SDG's in a way mend some of the ways the MDG's hindered Africa. My main goal however is to show how the SDG's are just a better overall system of goals than the MDG's were. The MDG's consisted of eight different goals with twenty-one targets while the newer SDG's consist of seven-teen goals with a number of targets under each goal as well, these targets all together add up to a total of 169. Clearly there is a huge difference in the amount of goals and targets going from the MDG's to the SDG's. I believe this is a representation of how much more time and thought they put into the SDG's compared to the MDG's.

### ***Findings and Analysis***

This project has allowed me to discover all the different improvement that countries have made since beginning these development goals, specifically in Africa as they focused on completing the MDG's. Shown in the figure below are the primary enrollment rates in Africa compared to other developing countries. As we can see, there has been improvement by both African countries and other developing countries. Even so, it is clear that the improvement by African countries is massive compared to the improvement of other developing countries. African countries jumped about sixty to seventy percent while other developing countries

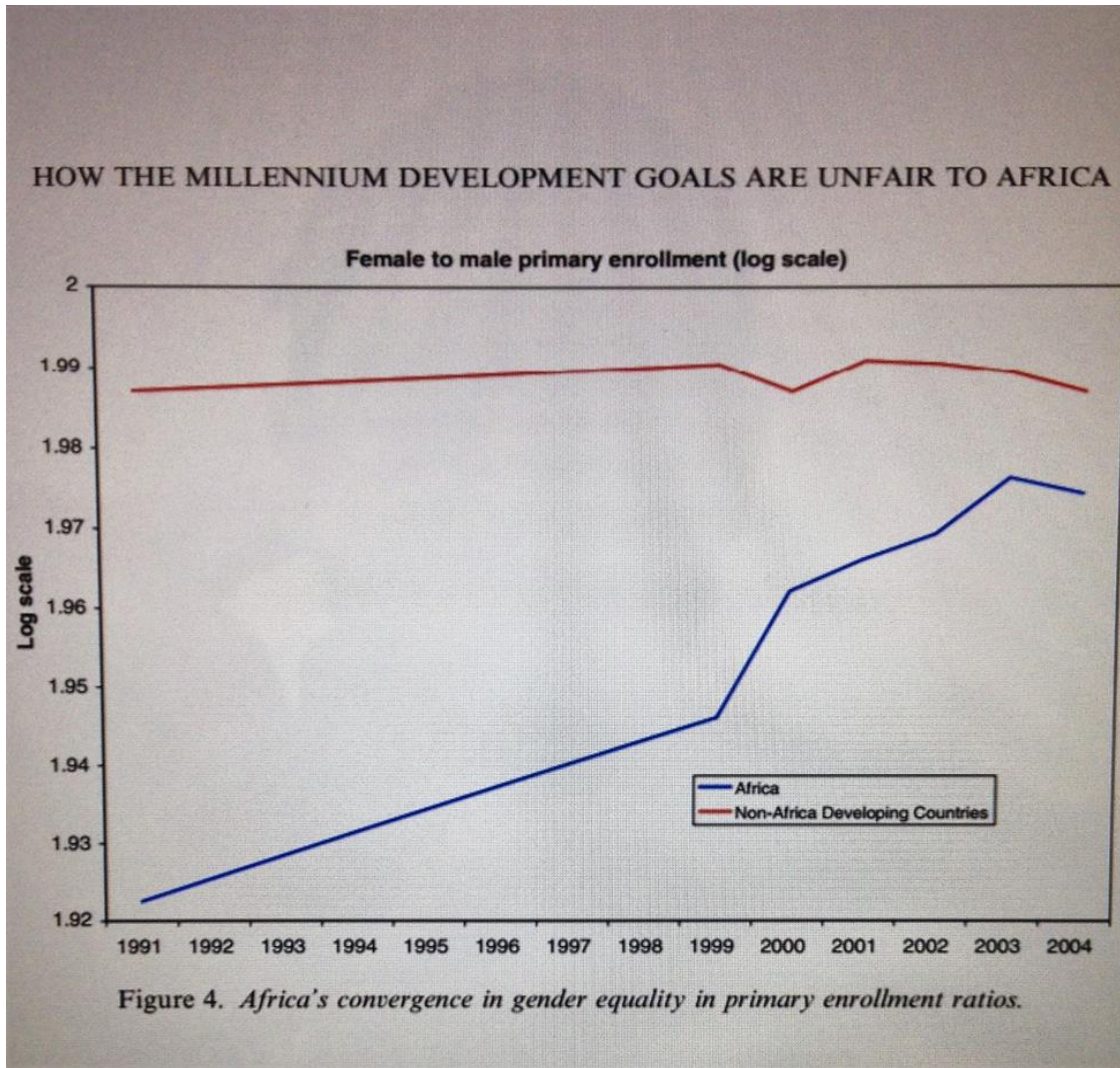
jumped about twenty-five to thirty percent. Be that as it may, African countries will still have failed this goal because they didn't reach the 100 percent primary enrollment rate required in order to achieve it.

**Figure 5: Primary enrollment rates in Africa and other developing countries**



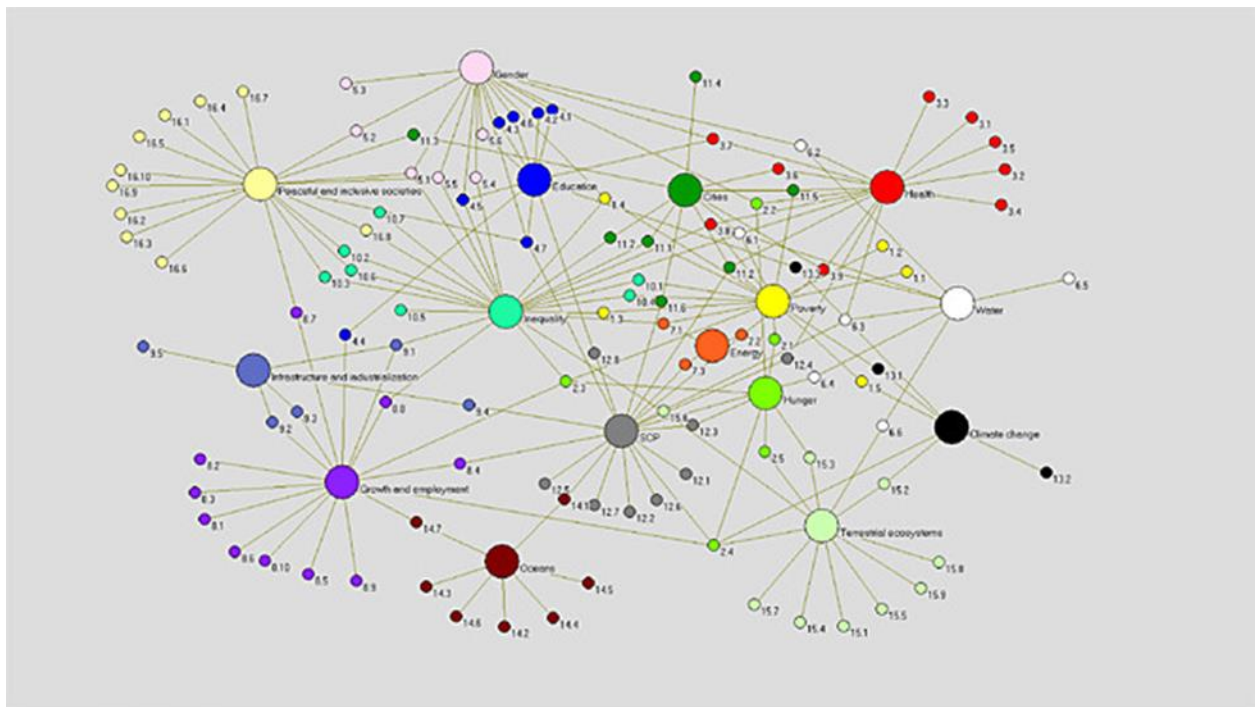
Similar to the goal above, another millennium development goal measured gender equality. The reason these two MDG's are alike is because gender equality was measured by ratios of boys to girls in primary and secondary schools. The figure below was constructed with data from the World Bank Development Indicators and shows boy to girl ratios in primary and secondary schools. As we can see, African countries have made massive improvements and are on the verge of catching up to other developing countries. However, this goal was also counted as a failure because African countries did not reach the ultimate target of 100 percent ratio of boys to girls in primary and secondary schools.





This was something I did not expect. Being as they are a set of goals that have a world-wide effect, I assumed all the millennium development goals would have been planned out better. I never thought a failure in one goal would basically guarantee failure in another, as we see with MDG's two and three. A big part of why the MDG's put developing countries at a disadvantage was because they measured some goals as absolute level targets and others as proportional changes. I could not find how they decided which goals would be measured in what way.

However, I found that the SDG's were a much more connected set of goals and represented a network more than individual goals. In the figure below, 16 SDG's are represented as larger circles, all in distinct colors. On the other hand, the targets of these SDG's are shown as smaller circles and have the same color of the goal which they belong to. They are linked only to that goal, giving it a flower-like structure. The targets are also labelled with their numbers as in the report of the Open Working Group. Other targets are linked with more than their own goal and provide the structure of the whole network. As we can see each goal is connected to at least two other goals through their targets.



Source: author's elaboration.

I used three theories or approaches in my project; the basic needs approach, sustainability theory, and the concept of the third way. These theories help explain my findings because they give me a deeper background to the roots of what the United Nations, world leaders, and other agencies such as the World bank and IMF were thinking when they were trying to set all these goals. The concept of the third way in particular focused on four main things. Putting

globalization at the center in order to get a better understanding of the world. Putting the individual at the center as the main target of public policies. The concept of governance as the main framework of politics, and finally socioeconomic strategies. These four ideas are all represented in the development agendas of the MDG's and SDG's and helped me understand the findings I made through my research.

### ***Conclusion***

Overall, the MDG's and the SDG's have been the basis for great improvement worldwide. But the concern with the MDG's was that it all came down to how the goals and targets were worded or phrased. In other words, whether they were measured through absolute level targets or as proportional changes. The way certain goals were measured differently set up Africa to fail from the start. Although they were some of the countries with the highest percentage increases across all seven MDG's, along with many important successes, they were still considered to fail all of them because they were not able to reach the ultimate target for these MDG's. Whether that was intentional or not is a completely different topic. However, if it was not intentional, they should have accommodated the greater difficulties faced by most of the African countries. If they had they would have probably come up with MDG's that were more reasonable and attainable by the African countries. This would have avoided some of the unintended consequences. For example, foreign private investors may have been discouraged from investing in Africa after seeing that they were going to fail most of the MDG's.

Another point is how one views the progress that has been made by all these countries and regions. If we look at the progress individually between all the countries and regions, of course people are going to compare them on whether they passed the MDG's or not and how many they reached successfully. On the other hand, if we looked at the global progress that all these

countries together have made we can agree that a great deal of improvement has actually been achieved. Especially in poverty reduction and educational attainment, there have been huge drops in percentages of overall poverty and of kids not attending primary school (The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015). Developing countries as a whole have cut the poverty rate in half between 1990 and 2010. Focusing more on the collective would give less importance to whether a certain country reached the goals or not and focus more on the actual progress a country made compared to where they began.

As far as the SDG's are concerned, four main points come to mind which inspire and challenge multiple agents of change. The first is planetary boundaries, in order to strengthen the urgency of addressing environmental concerns. The second is the safe and just operating space, to highlight the interconnectedness of social and environmental concerns and its distributive consequences for industrialized countries and emerging economies. In other words, making sure the development of factories and emerging economies does not affect the environment in any major way. The third is the energetic society, to engage new agents of change to forge ahead with new, more sustainable ways of doing things. And the fourth would be green competition, to initiate sustainable ideas and technologies and stimulate new business practices. As a linked network of goals and targets, I believe the SDG's will realize one way or another these four points. This is also why I believe the SDG's are a better set of goals than the MDG's. Poorer, developing countries, like the ones in Africa, receive the support they deserve and are more likely to achieve more of the goals. Just as Fehling, Nelson, & Venkatapuram mention in their article, "While MDGs have promoted increased health and well-being in many countries by recognizing and deliberating on the possible constraints of the MDG framework, the post-2015 agenda may have even greater impact" (Fehling et al., 2013).

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