

THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS: WHAT WENT WRONG AND WHAT IS GOING RIGHT?

Craig Webster

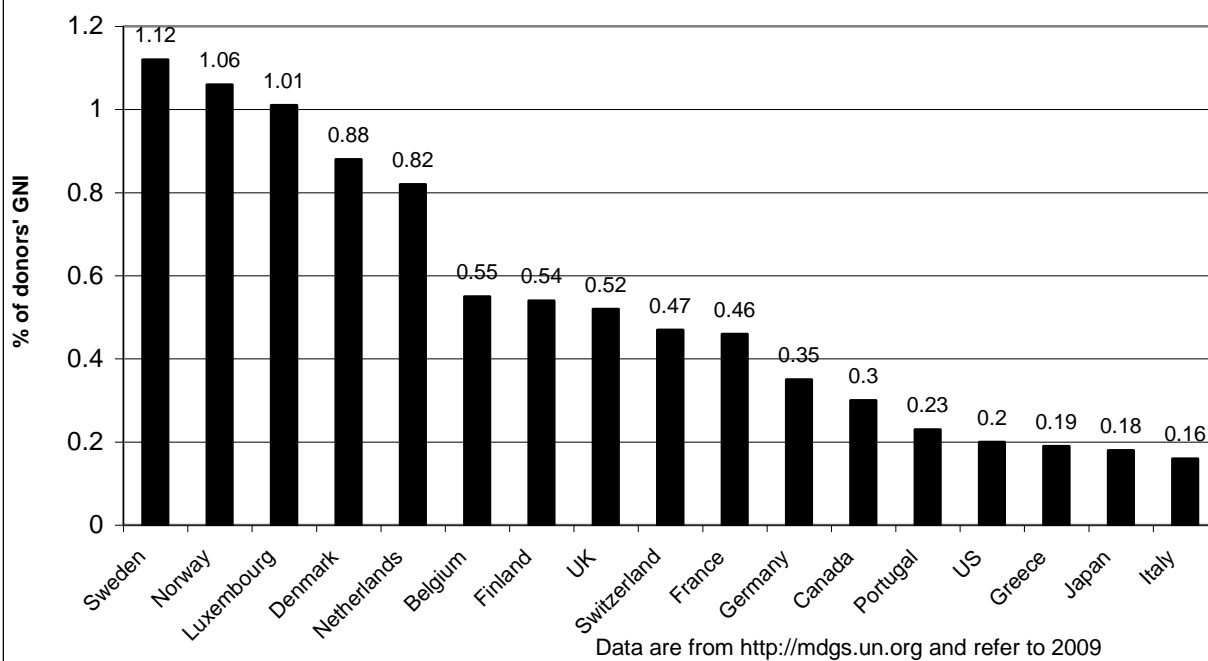
Associate Professor of Political Science

Department of European Studies and International Relations

A decade has gone by since the Millennium Development Goals were set up. The Millennium Development Goals sponsored by UN Secretary-General Annan in September 2000 was devised to create achievable goals in order to combat global poverty. The specific goals are to be achieved by 2015. It is significant that Dr. Jeffrey Sachs, a well-known and influential economist, was chosen to oversee this project and did oversee the project from 2002 to 2006. It is also significant that one decade later, there are some disappointments in terms of achieving the goals but also some noteworthy achievements. Here, we focus largely upon the key things that can be done in the developed countries to reach these goals.

To begin with, one of the interesting partial successes is the achievement of the 0.7% of the GNI of developed economies to be earmarked for development assistance in less developed countries, as illustrated below. As of 2009, there are a number of countries that have either met or surpassed this goal, according to the Millennium Development Goals Report 2010, a report made public in June 2010. The countries that have met or surpassed the goal are Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden. In 2009, Sweden led the pack with 1.12 percent of Gross National Income (GNI) being given as development assistance. It would seem that the Millennium Development Goals gave some incentives for Sweden to increase the quantity of money available for development in less developed countries, since in 2000, it only gave 0.8 percent of Gross National Income in development assistance.

**Official Development Assistance to Least Developed Countries
as % of Gross National Income for OECD Development
Assistance Committee Members**



However, many countries have failed to make significant increases in the quantity of funding in their development assistance programs. The biggest economies in the world have some of the lowest giving rates in the OECD countries. The USA only contributes 0.2 % of GNI to development assistance, Japan contributes approximately the same percentage (0.18% of GNI), and Germany 0.35% of GNI. The good news is that there have been some increases in giving and there have been countries that have succeeded in meeting the goals and maintaining support for their programs. The bad news is that some of the biggest economies in the world remain stingy in comparison with the (mostly) Scandinavian countries. Indeed, Japan has even decreased the percentage of its GNI dedicated to development assistance since 2000, according to the official United Nations site for the Millennium Development Goals indicators.

Also in terms of achievements in developed countries, it seems that the donors have moved more into giving untied development assistance, as the goals entailed. This marks a change from programs that have large elements that are designed to assist industries in the donor countries to ones that enable the recipients of assistance to decide for themselves from where goods and services used for development projects will be purchased. The most recent data from 2008 show that the mean proportion of bilateral ODA of OECD/DAC donors that is untied is 84.22%. The comparable figure from 2000 is 71.65%. This signals a change in the quality of development assistance. Indeed, some of the donors have reached the goal of only giving untied development assistance, Ireland, Luxembourg, Norway and the UK, have all reached this

goal and eleven other members of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee report that over 90 percent of their development assistance is untied.

Apart from these successes in terms of the quantity of development assistance going to where it is needed, as well as changes in terms of the quality of the development assistance given, there have also been successes in terms of helping those who the entire project was intended to assist, the world's poorest populations. The Millennium Development Goals Report 2010 reports a great deal regarding progress in poverty reduction, advances in children getting to school in some of the poorest countries in the world, improvements in health in poor countries, and some other improvements.

For those in the developed world, there are still significant things that can be done and should be doing to assist in making sure that the goals are reached. The first is to keep political pressure upon political elites to ensure that they reach a long-standing goal that has generally not been reached, the earmarking of 0.7% of the GNI of the developed economies for development assistance purposes. Although the question of development assistance and its funding is largely in the hands of political elites, it is reassuring that there is considerable public support and continuing public support for development assistance programs in donor countries. There is strong indication that these high levels of support have remained, even in our times of financial crisis (Zimmerman 2008).

What is noteworthy is that those states with social democratic welfare states and those states with highly influential social democratic parties over the decades tend to be the most generous and seem to perform well in terms of reaching the goals. This is expected and would be predicted, according to the views of some of the literature on development assistance (Noël and Thérien 1995 Thérien and Noël 2000). Investigations of World Values Surveys show that there is an interesting relationship between high levels of unemployment and what this does in terms of public opinion and individuals' views on how generous their governments should be. Counter-intuitively, in those donor countries with higher levels of unemployment, the population is more supportive of more generous development assistance policies than in countries with lower levels of unemployment. So, it is reassuring that the public opinion in donor countries remains supportive of development assistance generosity and is unlikely to change, even in the face of internal pressures on the welfare state.

Unfortunately, there seems to be very little done to adjust the world's wildly unfair trading system and there is little indication that the richest countries will radically reduce subsidies to their agricultural producers. These subsidies in the richest countries in the world ensure that some of the poorest farmers in the poorest countries do not have the chance to sell their produce on the global market in a fair way. But then, these subsidies in the richest countries have greatly benefited the struggling farmers of the developed countries, such as Queen Elizabeth II, the Duke of Westminster, and Prince Albert of Monaco.

Without such subsidies as the £486,534 given to the Duke of Westminster in 2008 by the EU, he would only have a fortune estimated at £6.5 billion to fall back on, as well as the income from some of his other businesses, such as his Polish dairy business that received a mere 8 million Euros in EU subsidies between 2006 and 2007 (Waterfield 2009). The political will to change agricultural subsidies seems to be a greater impediment to alleviating global poverty than the public's resistance to increasing development assistance funding to less developed countries. It can only be hoped that pressures will eventually be exerted to change the system of subsidies in the richest countries since they lead to increased inequalities on a global scale and possibly increase inequalities within the wealthiest of countries as well.

Noël, Alain and Thérien, Jean-Phillippe (1995) "From Domestic to International Justice: The Welfare State and Foreign Aid", *International Organization*, Vol. 49, pp. 523-554.

Thérien, Jean-Phillippe and Noël, Alain (2000) "Political Parties and Foreign Aid", *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 94, pp. 151-162.

United Nations. (2010) Millennium Development Goals Report 2010. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

Waterfield, Bruno. (18 July 2009) "EU farm subsidies paid to big business." The Telegraph.

Zimmerman, Robert. (2008) "The Fallout from the Financial Crisis (5): the End of Public Support for Development Aid?" OECD Development Centre. <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/56/35/41804623.pdf>