

# **What kind of change are the SDGs likely to bring about?**

**Duncan Green  
September 2018**

# Confession: I am an SDG sceptic

OXFAM DISCUSSION PAPERS

NOVEMBER 2012

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## HOW CAN A POST-2015 AGREEMENT DRIVE REAL CHANGE? REVISED EDITION

The political economy of global commitments

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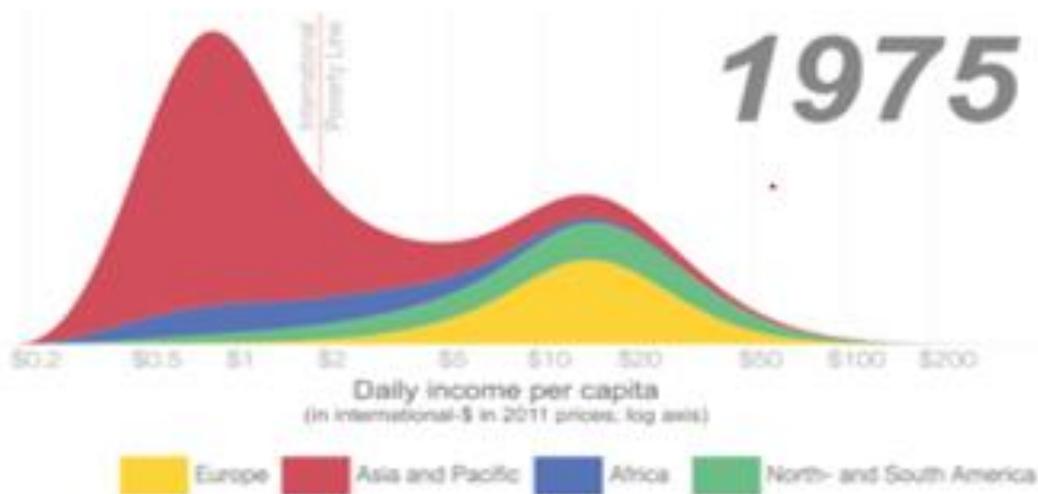
# From the MDGs to the SDGs



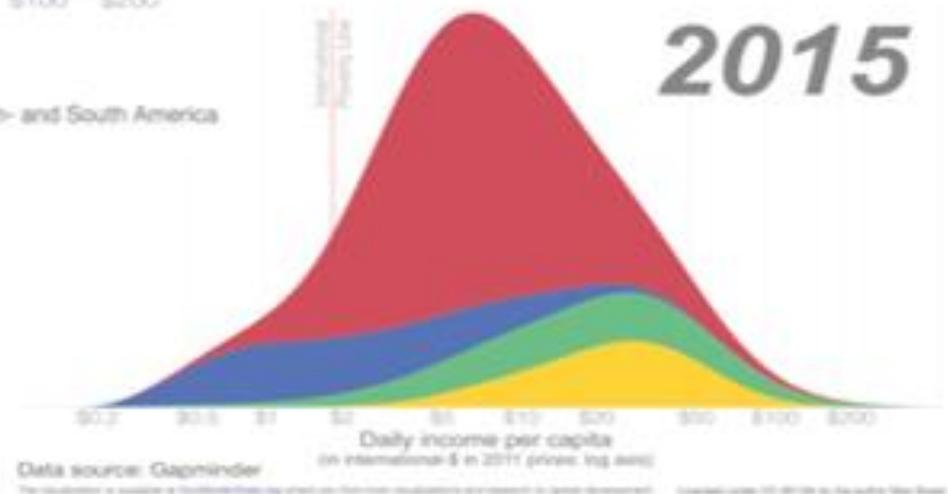
## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



# Understanding the differences: A lot changed 2000 → 2015



- In the past two decades, the proportion of the world's population in extreme poverty has decreased significantly*



# Including the political Centre of Gravity



## Some of the Big Differences

- **One big poverty → lots of specific poverties**
- **North v South → Uppers v Loweres (inequality)**
- **Open System → Closed (Planetary Boundaries)**
- **More voices (both governments and beyond – CSOs, Private Sector)**

## **These differences shape the SDGs**

- **Lots more Goals/Targets (17/169)**
- **Universal – they apply to all countries**
- **From Aid → Domestic Resources**

## So Why Was I Sceptical?

- **Process was driven by aid business' desire for a successor to the MDGs**
- **But MDGs should have been called the 'Millennium Aid Goals', and aid was becoming less important for development**
- **No-one had *ever* asked 'which of MANY international agreements influence national governments and why?'**
- **Why do we never hear of the CRC or ILO Convention 189?**

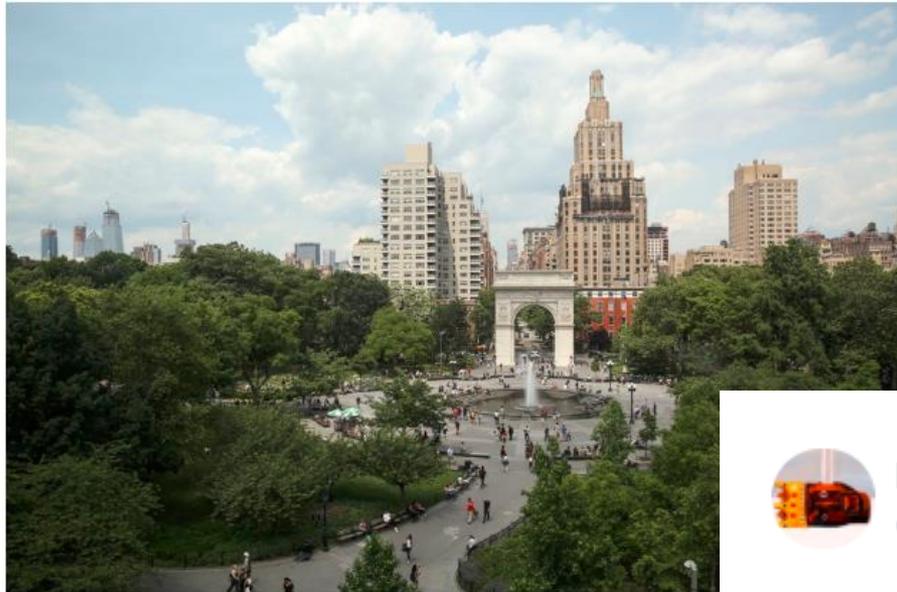
## **3 years on, what do we know about impact?**

- **Not a lot, but some surprises**
- **Impact in the North**
- **Rapid domestication in Middle Income Countries**
- **Not sure on Low Income Countries (still an aid conversation?)**
- **In general a ‘looser script’ than the MDGs (‘Leave No-one Behind)**
- **But even where there is impact, we don’t know why – politics is still missing!**

# Significant impact in the North

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Amr AlBky/Reuters

## Why New York City Is Reporting Its Sustainability Progress to the UN



KANYE WEST   
@kanyewest

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The United Nations introduced the Sustainable Development goals and platform in 2015 to transform the world by 2030

- Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

# Middle Income Countries: the case of Ecuador

- **SDGs selected according to national priorities (disability, urbanisation)**
- **Seen as way to demonstrate global leadership**
- **National and City governments interpreting in different ways**

## **Private Sector, especially TNCs**

- **Limited action, but LOTS of reporting (acc to forthcoming Oxfam report)**
- **A useful framework for institutional investors**
- **No information on southern-based TNCs or smaller enterprises**

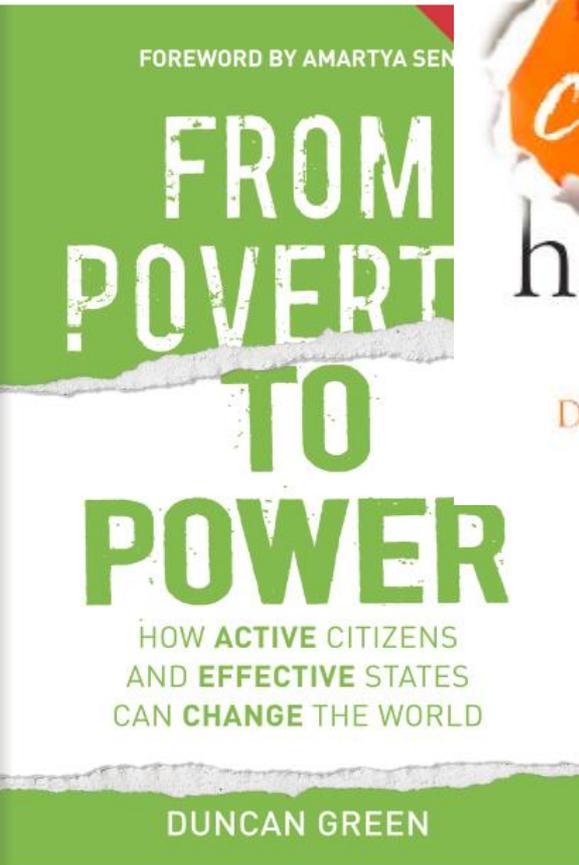
## Questions and Dilemmas

- **Is picking and choosing a problem?**
- **Do the SDGs let governments off too lightly, undermining more binding agreements (UN, ILO)?**
- **Or are non-binding agreements better at influencing norms and behaviours compared to more legalistic approaches?**
- **Do we have to repeat this every X years to keep things fresh?**

## Conclusion? From Sceptic → Agnostic

- **Rash Predictions for 2018-2030:**
  - **SDGs will crop up in unexpected ways and places**
  - **Their influence will be subtle and drip-drip, rather than compliance-based**
  - **Their main impact/failure will be in helping rebuild/create a vision of a shared direction for humanity, and a desire for change, especially among young people.**
  - **How that desire manifests will vary with time and topic, and that's fine.**
  - **And we'll never really know about impact!**

**Thankyou: for more see @fp2p, blog or books (free online)**



## How can research help promote empowerment and accountability?

Print PDF

03 Mar 2015

Tags: accountability, DFID, empowerment Categories: Aid, Gender, NGOs, Politics 3 Comments

In the development business, DFID is a research juggernaut (180 dedicated staff, £345m annual budget, according to the ad for a new boss for its Research and Evidence Division). So it's good news that they are consulting researchers, NGOs etc tomorrow on their next round of funding for research on empowerment and accountability (E&A). Unfortunately, I can't



### ABOUT

This is a conversational blog written and maintained by Duncan Green, strategic adviser for Oxfam GB and author of 'From Poverty to Power'. This personal reflection is not intended as a comprehensive statement of Oxfam's agreed policies.



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## And because it's almost lunch

- **Here's what the SDGs could help us get away from**
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbqA6o8\\_WC0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbqA6o8_WC0)