

## Testing the Global Community's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Against Professional Standards and International Law

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### Abstract

This article examines the global community's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda for 2016 to 2030 by applying several previously published professional and legal indicators, peer reviewed in a variety of fields, for measuring compliance with international law and professional standards in the social and management sciences for sustainable development, poverty reduction, and development to see how the SDGs do. Overall, the SDGs show little change in substantive, ideological or implementation approach from the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). They are largely a reassertion of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century European colonial approaches to weaker nations and cultures in violation of many of the principles established under international law for global peace, security and rights following the end of World War II. The implications of this approach, despite the claims, are that the SDGs are likely to further threaten international law objectives for protecting cultural diversity, sovereignty, sustainability and survival in a way that undermines not just international law but also global security.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); United Nations; Sustainable Development; Development

**Biographical Note:** David Lempert, Ph.D., J.D., M.B.A., E.D. (Hon.), social anthropologist and attorney, has pioneered approaches in comparative studies of development while also building the infrastructure for practical application and for interdisciplinary social science. He has worked in more than 30 countries and has founded NGOs or projects in democratic experiential education, heritage protection, and sustainable development. This article is among a

series of applied indicator and professional codes that he has published as part of an effort to protect professionalism and create accountability in the “development” sector/international interventions while promoting civilization and “progress”.

**Author’s Note:**

Most of the discussions about “the future” when I was growing up were about expanding human potential and civilization in every field of activity from the sciences to the arts to social justice. The focus was not so much on materialism but on values, quality of life, discovery, diversity, democracy and participation, and creativity. These were all parts of the post-World War II goals in international law and “development”, with a focus on social justice and peace and law, starting with the aspirations of individuals, communities and society as a whole. I focused my career on those visions, with skills of a lawyer, an anthropologist, and a manager, with experience in the arts and humanities and also experimentation in the sciences. Most of that discussion seems to have now disappeared, with the focus now only on “survival” and economics as if we have been reduced to the state of animals and little more. We seem to live in an Orwellian world where things are now the opposite of what they claim to be and there is little discussion of any kinds of possibilities or visions. “Development” and “sustainable development” and measures of “progress” and “justice” seem to now be only shadows of their original meanings. We seem to have reversed the earlier goals of the international community that were enshrined and heralded in international laws, in the professional definitions and measures of “development”, and the ways we think about being human and civilized. In my career and this article, I have tried to make sure that we have real measures and standards to keep us on track so that we can move forwards rather than backwards and avoid making the same mistakes of the past. In this article, I apply these legal and professional measures and standards to the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to show how the SDGs are erasing the actual Universal Development Goals of humanity and imposing an agenda that has little to do with real “sustainability” or progress despite its claims.

## I. Introduction

On September 28, 2015, political leaders of the globe's nation states gathered at the United Nations to announce their agreement on a joint set of goals for which they called for commitments of some 1% of the Gross World Product (some \$800 billion or more) per year for the next 15 years (using World Bank GWP estimates: World Bank, 2015). They called them the "Sustainable Development Goals" (SDGs) or "Agenda 2030".

U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon described them as a kind of panacea, telling the 70<sup>th</sup> session of the U.N.'s General Assembly that, "our destination is in our sights: an end to extreme poverty by 2030; a life of peace and dignity for all" (Ban Ki Moon, 2015).

Most of the press simply reported Moon's rhetoric, calling the 17 SDGs and the 169 mostly non-quantified sub-goals a "towering achievement" and "inspiring" (Ban Ki Moon, 2015), without presenting more substantive or opposing views.

If the treatment of the SDGs in academic journals and in the press is similar to that for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that preceded them (U.N. Millennium Declaration, 2000; U.N., 2013), from 2001 to 2015 (and this seems to be the case in the author's searches of the literature, to date), most publications are likely to refrain from criticism in the initial years and offer only a spirit of "optimism" and report on "implementation and progress" rather than "criticism and reflection" (Fehling, Nelson and Vekataparam, 2013). Nevertheless, even during the several months leading up to the announcement, criticisms of what the SDGs needed to be doing and appeared not to be doing, slowly began to surface based on experiences with the MDGs. One critic, for example, describing the "impending failure of the SDGs" based on its initial draft, claimed it would likely be no more than a "rhetorical tool" calling for "homage" from "every government official and international aid worker" while "failing to hold accountable the appropriate actors in international development" (Wisor, 2014). The same critic called it a "long and entirely unattainable wish list" as the result of "political lobbying by every interest group that wants their issue represented" in ways that "replay many of the flaws of the original MDGs."

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, in addressing the U.N. General Assembly at the time of adoption of the SDGs in late 2015, hinted that perhaps international development aid and the SDGs were little more than attempts at hegemony and propaganda. In his veiled criticism that did not identify exactly what agenda he believed was being promoted in the SDGs or what made Russian assistance better, he noted that, by contrast, "Russian development assistance is invariably aimed at solving the most pressing challenges faced by the countries in need. In these efforts, we are neither trying to lecture our partners on how they should build their lives, nor imposing political models and values" (South-South News, 2015).

If the proposed global spending on the SDGs is to be an investment in assuring the sustainability of humans, the survival of the globe's 6,000 remaining cultures in their eco-systems (Krauss, 1992), and a reduction in the costs of conflict, environmental disasters, and of human suffering, it would be well worth it. An insurance cost of anywhere from 1-5% of global GDP, including a reduction in outputs in order to protect resources, would certainly be worth the investment to achieve these goals given the costs already spent in the global economy for insuring health, property, and security, that are now collectively much more than that.

Such an approach would be a major achievement and marked change, if not a reversal, from the international community's spending on the MDGs that largely avoided any mention of sustainable development (other than in MDG 7 that was entitled merely "Environmental Sustainability") during the previous 15 years.

This author, like many others, welcomes serious international efforts on resolving global problems. Yet, this author and many others have questioned whether the agenda of major nations and their leaders has accelerated these problems or, alternatively, has addressed them through strategies that adhere to international law and agreements and to protect humanity and the planet (Lempert, 2017b; Lempert and Nguyen, 2009). Indeed, the world's cultures continue to be at risk (UNESCO, 2003; Lempert, 2010). Global impacts on poverty elimination are questionable (Lempert, 2015a). The planet's environment is in danger (Worldwatch Institute, 2015). The costs of crises continue.

Is the new 2030 agenda of Sustainable Development Goals part of a solution recognized by U.N. representatives for performing their stewardship role and meeting the requirements agreed to under international law for "development" (Lempert, 2014a, 2014b) or is it

just the ineffective medicine, public relations, or perhaps something else, in new bottles?

Given public criticisms about global environmental treaties as unenforceable and lacking political will, the SDGs confront skepticism among many of those who focus on sustainable development, in regards to real commitments to the environment. Indeed, international treaties and the United Nations Climate Change Conferences to discuss efforts related to those treaties year after year, such as the 21 annual Conference of the Parties (COP) to the U.N.'s Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC, 1992) and the 11<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, led to mass public demonstrations worldwide in 2016 and continual criticism and disillusionment if not claims of “fraud” (Milman, 2015). Are the SDGs just another set of unenforceable “goals” talking the talk of “sustainability” but not taking the needed actions? Even if there is commitment, what will they actually achieve?

There are standards in public administration, law and managerial accounting that specify what makes plans and “action plans” actionable and enforceable (Emmanuel, Merchant and Otley, 1990; Garrison, Noreen and Brewer, 2005; Seidman and Seidman, 2000). There are ways to test international agreements and interventions like the SDGs and to hold them directly accountable to specific measures of effectiveness for public policy. These measures can answer the first question, about whether they are even enforceable and “actionable”, before getting to the question of whether they meet specific social science definitions and needs in “sustainable development”, “development” and other related goals like “poverty alleviation”.

According to descriptions of the SDGs offered on the U.N.'s website, the process of formulating the SDGs was one that occurred with wide participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are claimed to be in praise of the results (though certainly acknowledging that they all have self-interest in funding to implement it) (U.N., 2013b, 2015). This is praise offered by the participants in the process, many of whom will benefit directly in the SDGs and will share in the implementation of specific projects as “stakeholders”. While such praise carries some weight, it is not a systematic and scientific examination of the SDGs as a whole.

Given the numbers of SDGs and sub-goals as well as the lack of any real measurements or baselines, priorities, or even clarity of

basic definitions in terms of professional measures (such as a basic definition of “sustainable” or “development” that references either bedrock international law or professionalism), making sense of the SDGs seems like a difficult task. The 17 target goals are double the previous 9 MDGs. The 169 sub-goals cover a wide range of issues and fields.

Neither the U.N., nor Member States, nor any other professional body appears to have applied any procedure for screening the SDGs against international law or professional standards of sustainable development. Nor does there seem to have been any references to professional measures and international legal definitions for development, sustainable development, progress, or long-term poverty reduction..

What makes this article different from other approaches to examining the U.N. system’s international goals, is that the author applies an integrated and systematic approach to the SDGs using the best available peer-reviewed scientific and professional measures of “sustainable development”, “development”, and “poverty reduction” as well as professional measures of consistency with international law, public administration effectiveness, and cultural change. Most previous discussions have been ad hoc and focusing on single issues or particular impacts on development (Fehling, Nelson, and Venkhatapuram, 2013), often by specific stakeholder beneficiaries in implementation with potential conflicts of interest. Recent approaches to sustainability have also begun to take a technological or engineering focus in the belief that certain innovations that are being adapted in industrialized urban countries and cultures are also appropriate in the diverse cultures of the Third World. The approach of this author, by contrast, is to recognize the different perspectives, choices, and needs of different cultures in their own environments and to apply systems thinking and measures from a variety of disciplines to test the actual workings of initiatives like the MDGs and SDGs.

In examining the SDGs, one might also reasonably ask why the U.N. systems development goals are not coming directly out of the existing international laws and declarations that define “sustainability” and “development” and why they are not working from these directly. Why is it that the U.N. system generated the SDGs through a process that did not directly systematize or reference the clear existing categories that were already established for international development in a body of laws over 70 years? Indeed,

this body of laws already sets a clear framework of long-term target goals for the international community that this author presented in several peer-reviewed journals as the recognized “Universal Development Goals” of the international system (Lempert, 2014b; 2014b; 2015a; Lempert and Nguyen, 2008). Since other authors have also asked why the U.N. has refused to follow its own basis of international law and its universal goals in development in regards to the MDGs (Saith, 2006; Hill, Mansour and Claudio, 2010; Waage, Banerji, Campbell, Chirwa, Collender, Dieltiens and Unterhalter, 2010), one might legitimately ask the discomfoting question, why restate and redefine what already exists unless the purpose is to replace and divert attention from what already exists?

In fact, there are methods for analyzing the SDGs against both international law and professional standards from social science and managerial science in the area of international development interventions and coming to reliable conclusions on their likely impacts. In the past, such analysis has been cumbersome, but there are now ways to streamline it. While there is a great deal of scientific and professional literature defining “sustainable development” as well as defining what makes international agreements effective, there have, up until recently, been few measurement tools that apply these definitions in ways that are comprehensive and represent a consensus in the scientific and professional community.

In order to meet this gap, this author has been working with colleagues in sustainability and development and in various related disciplines such as law, public administration, social anthropology, and economics, to try to systematize development measures and to make them easier to use. The goal has not been to invent new standards, since standards already exist. It has been to take established standards in specific areas like “sustainable development” and international legal consensus in established treaties and international laws in areas like “development” as well as combinations of standards and laws in areas like “poverty reduction”, to identify the key elements that meet the definitions, and to place them in comprehensive but easy-to-use indicators to measure (and “score”) interventions to see how effective they are in meeting the required elements.

In previous articles, this author has presented these measures (accountability indicators) in peer reviewed journals that have affirmed that the author’s indicators do, indeed, comprehensively

represent the consensus science and legal agreements for those fields. The author has then measured the effectiveness of the MDGs in ways that have yielded scores for the legal accountability and effectiveness (or lack thereof) of the MDGs. These indicators show where the MDGs were meeting or failing to meet their goals, establishing a baseline for what the SDGs needed to do. Indeed, recent articles by others criticizing the MDGs and calling for improvements in the SDGs have largely confirmed and reinforced what these measures highlight as the various aspects of weaknesses of the MDGs and needs for the SDGs (Wisor, 2014; Fehling, Nelson and Vekataparam, 2013; Kabeer, 2010; Fukuda-Parr, 2010; Hills, Mansoor and Claudio, 2010; Saith, 2006; Waage, Banerji, Campbell, Collender, Dieltiens, and Unterhalter, 2010).

This article examines the global community's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda for 2016 to 2030 by applying three of these previously published professional and legal indicators for measuring compliance with international law and professional social and managerial science standards for sustainable development, poverty reduction, and development to see how the SDGs do and whether they actually reflect improvements on the MDGs.

Overall, the SDGs show little change in substantive, ideological or implementation approach from the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that would reverse the legal accountability failures and professional shortcomings of the MDGs. They fail to meet professional and international legal standards in any of the three categories. This failure suggests that while they continue to make claims for attracting enormous amounts of global funds to be administered by a small group of officials and implementing organizations, they are in fact promoting an agenda of globalization, urbanization and assimilation that does not appear to be sustainable or in line with international law or with social science and management science standards.

A fourth measurement test, using professional standards from anthropology to identify culture change, offers a simple comparison of the SDGs (and MDGs) with the pre-World War II "civilizing missions" of European colonialism. It shows that both are largely a reassertion of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century European colonial approaches to weaker nations and cultures. They are not only in violation of many of the principles established under international law for global peace, security and rights following the end of World War II. Despite the claims to the contrary by the U.N. system, the



implications of this approach are that the SDGs are likely to further threaten cultural diversity, sovereignty, sustainability and survival in a way that undermines global security, the fundamental mission of the U.N.

This article begins with a description of the SDGs and comparison to the MDGs that preceded them in a way that places the SDGs in the political context as a continuation from the MDGs, highlighting continuities and changes in a way that makes it easier to then use the comprehensive indicators to “score” the SDGs and to see whether or not, and by how much, they improve on the MDGs. It then describes the methodological basis of the four different tests that can be used to analyze the SDGs and that are used professionally to examine international (and domestic) development interventions.

The piece then sequentially applies the four different tests to the SDGs and compares the results to those for the MDGs, using the scoring from the MDGs as a baseline and noting some slight but relatively inconsequential differences.

## **II. Contextualizing the SDGs with the MDGs:**

Both the MDGs and SDGs are part of an international political process of countries and organizations that provide inputs internationally and domestically in “development”. In trying to understand what the SDGs mean and what they may do, as well as how they might be used, one needs to see them in as a follow-up to the MDGs and to try to understand them in that context.

This section presents descriptions and interpretive analyses of the SDGs in terms of form as a prelude to analysis of the SDGs as a policy tool in specific areas of development through measurement tests.

### The Form of the SDGs as a Policy Document:

- Interpretive analysis of the SDGs as a policy document and an attempt at an “actionable” plan

For readers who want to understand the content of the SDGs and their relationship to the MDGs, this description and analysis is presented in the Annex:

### The Content of the SDGs and a Comparison to the MDGs:

- Interpretive content analysis of the comparative emphases of the SDGs and MDGs

### **(i) The Form of the SDGs as a Policy Document**

The international agreement presenting the SDGs is long and unusual for a policy document that purports to be a guide to action and spending. That raises questions about what kind of document it actually is and what its intentions are. Perhaps the best way to describe it is as a very long list; but a list of what, to be used by whom to do exactly what?

Although the basic mission of the U.N. system is referenced, there are no clear links of the SDGs to that mission to explain how they further the key elements of global peace, security, and rights (including community/cultural protections and individual protections) that are the essential mission for the U.N. and the basis for its policies and interventions.

There is a mission statement. It is to “free the human race from the tyranny of poverty” and to “heal and secure our planet” in a way such that “no one is left behind” (UN, 2015, p. 2).

The 35 page document introducing the SDGs offers only two overall measurable targets for the collective set of 17 SDGs: one for promoting income growth of weaker countries (7% GDP per year), using the measure of income and not assets/wealth or per capita wealth that is the standard professional measure of economic improvement (Samuelson, 1961; Nordhaus and Tobin, 1972; Stiglitz, 2009), and a second measure (in multiple parts) for how much money countries should provide to the U.N. and their implementing partners to spend on these goals (UN, 2015, p. 26). Although the 169 sub-goals are defined as “targets”, they are not, in fact, targets, because they offer few or no measures to aim at, and are mostly only categories. The identification of categories as goals makes sense if the goals were understandable within the context of overall objectives. If the overall purpose of the SDGs were actually to promote “sustainable development” to achieve the objectives of specific treaties or declarations under international law, such as the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (U.N. Conference on Environment and Development, 1992), they could potentially be written so as to target the systematic process or balance of sustainability (e.g., the scientific definition of “sustainability”, following the “IPAT” equation for balancing consumption and production). Similarly, if the overall purpose were to achieve long-term poverty alleviation in furtherance of specific goals that are also

in international treaties, like the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) or the U.N. International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights (1966), targets would need to identify root causes of poverty and behaviors that need to be changed. The “targeting” would be scientific selection and prioritization of the recognized approaches for changing behaviors so as to assure that poverty would not arise. The targets would also explain how to work within the political and cultural processes for institutionalizing these goals within cultures, communities, and national systems across the globe. Where reducing poverty might require population control or social solidarity and redistribution (political changes), the target would be on the underlying human behaviors that prevent social solidarity and political equality. Appropriate targets for long-term solutions would include explanations on how to balance competing short and long-term objectives, in ways that fulfill the different treaty obligations and are consistent with recognized principles. The SDGs, however, do not offer these types of “targets” and “measures”.

The difficulty in determining what actual word applies to these “goals” is not the lack of “detail” of the list but the appropriateness or fit of the list within the context of these international treaty obligations and the scientifically and professionally measurable goals in an integrated, logical and systematic way in each national, cultural and community context, and with an appropriate process (the professionalism of public administration and measured goal setting and law). Since all are entirely absent here even though they are also recognized as the key essential elements to any public policy, the form of the document can best be described as an aggregated list of disparate types of interventions from different constituencies that have been assembled together under 17 main categories and then 169 subordinate categories.

### **III. Critique of the SDGs as a Policy Document and an Attempt at an Implementation Plan of Activities within the U.N. Mandate and International Law**

It is easy to be confused about what the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are and intend to do that goes beyond what was already happening internationally in “development” interventions because they are nothing more than a list of some 169

potential interventions, not integrated into the established and comprehensive approaches for achieving sustainability (Ehrlich and Holdren, 1971) or cultural survival. There are no priorities based on root causes of problems, categories, or strategies that would indicate they follow the basic prerequisites of public administration for effective and implementable policy (Barry, 1984; Bryson, 1988) and for accountability. Nor are there ways of addressing potential conflicting objectives or competing priorities of “sustainability” and “poverty alleviation”, “growth” versus “sustainability”, or short-term versus long-term objectives. While some of these choices are to be left to local actors, one might ask what the actual value-added of the SDGs is over current political choices. How does it actually work to challenge current failed priorities that are leading to unsustainability and poverty given that they offer few clear measures that can be flexibly applied in different circumstances in ways that are consistent with principles of public management and achieving results (Emmanuel, Merchant, and Otley, 1990)<sup>1</sup>? If its goal is to inform and direct country-specific goal setting in line with international treaties and in ways that overcomes previous failures, how does it why does it not it follow the standard principles of public policy in order to do that?

Rather than analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the SDGs as an “action plan”, this section tries to determine if there is an actual logic of the SDGs, that could be actionable, and attempts to decipher what it is and on what assumptions it is based, to see if there is a clear policy objective that could be actionable.

A very quick way to analyze the SDGs and to decode or “deconstruct” its strategy, if a clear strategy exists, to see if its meets this requirement for effectiveness is to see if the 17 goals can be divided into some standard categories of goals that are used in any kind of planning document: end goals (results/output/outcome goals), intermediate goals (inputs/implementation goals), and professional, moral, and legal standards goals (protections/requirements and constraints). If so, these goals could then be placed into a sequence that would reveal the underlying logic of the document.

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<sup>1</sup> Part of the confusion is that rather than start with the name “sustainable development” and then define it clearly, the U.N. Secretary General and associated documents seem to describe the SDGs as geared to the same goal as the MDGs, to “end extreme poverty” (Ban Ki Moon, 2015; U.N., 2015) rather than to achieve the purpose for which they are named, “sustainable development”.

The UN documents on the SDGs point to several main outcome goals even though they do not present a clear set of problems, root causes, or logic to try to solve them, which standard public management requires for effectiveness. The SDGs can be presented in full in three long sentences, dividing the goals into end goals, intermediate/implementing goals, and standards. Here is what the SDGs seek to do and how:

1) The ultimate or end goal of the 2030 Agenda is to “end hunger” (SDG 2) and “end poverty” (SDG 1) by goals that could be considered end goals (and partly intermediate goals) of increasing incomes, increasing global consumption of “modern energy” (SDG 7) and improving sanitation (SDG 6) and health (SDG 3). (These are the outputs/results goals)

2) International actors seek to achieve the above end goals by promoting economic growth of at least 7% per year in Lesser Developed Countries and by creating employment (SDG 8) through technology transfer and globalization (SDG 17), industrialization (SDG 9), industrial agriculture (SDG 2 in combination with SDG 17), urbanization (SDG 11) and homogenization (reducing inequality by standardizing consumption and incomes) (SDG 10). This includes mechanisms of state education (SDG 4) and gender equality (SDG 5) in ways that provide more efficiency and participation at the local level (SDG 16) (These are the means/input goals but note that one might raise questions about some of them as to whether they are actually means/input goals or ends, like industrialization (SDG 9) and perhaps others))

3) International actors promise to achieve this increased consumption by taking unstated actions that are either inputs or additional activities to combat climate change (SDG 13) while “sustainably using” the world’s marine resources (SDG 14), and terrestrial ecosystems and forests (SDG 15). Additionally, signatories agree to halt biodiversity loss, land degradation and desertification (SDG 15), and ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns (SDG 12), recognizing that developing countries do not have to follow any of these protections and can focus on consumption and exploitation of resources (SDG 12), and noting that these goals for protection have no priority since the goals of

resource exploitation are to be treated “as of equal weight” (SDG 17) and that all country governments can pick and choose from the SDGs in response to whatever pressures and financial incentives they receive, without any obligations. (These are the unbinding conditions for achieving the overall list of goals)

In looking at the above list, one might also ask why all of the goals relating to sustainability in the SDGs seem to be relegated to unrelated inputs (e.g., SDGs 12, 14 and 15) rather than placed as end goals. The answer is that the SDG document does not prioritize sustainable balances of consumption and production or survival of cultures in their environments as the ultimate ends or as the means to achieving poverty reduction. Although all of the goals are to be considered as “equal”, the document seems to highlight “growth”. So, if there could be said to be an underlying “priority” of the equal goals, it seems to be “growth”.

The basic assumption of the SDG Agenda, stated at the beginning of the document, is that “eradicating poverty ... is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development” (UN, 2015, p. 2) and not the other way around (i.e., sustainable use of resources is the only way to protect against poverty). It is possible that this statement is simply being used as a way to try to explain a link with the MDGs and the naming of the SDGs. There is no description of where this assumption comes from, how it fits within the U.N. mission and established U.N. laws (if they do), or on what evidence it is based. Note that there is no explanation or justification in the document as to the choice for highlighting or the validity of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as only one of a relatively small number of specific measures in the document. Nor is there an explanation of how it is consistent with either “sustainable development” or “poverty alleviation” (UN, 2015, p. 26) given that many economists believe that at least for many communities in fragile environments, the only way to achieve sustainability is through a “steady state” or “de-growth” (Daly, and Farley, 2003; Daly, 2011). It is increasing the consumption of peoples in vulnerable eco-systems to levels of global mass culture that threatens sustainability (Lempert, 2015a). Moreover, the use of GDP as a target measure is also widely discredited both within environmental economics and within public and private accounting since it violates the professional measurement standard of economics (Samuelson, 1961; Nordhaus and Tobin, 1972; Stiglitz, 2009). GDP measures only short-term income, often at the expense

of long-term wealth (e.g., through rapid sale of assets) and of per-capita increases in wealth (even if higher incomes increase wealth, per capita wealth may decline as population grows, making people poorer even though GDP rises) (Mishan, 1967; Dasgupta and Maler, 2000; Van den Bergh, 2009).

Indeed, almost all sustainable development experts understand the logic of sustainability to be the reverse of the assumption offered in the SDGs; “growth” is only part of sustainability when cultures choose to continually increase their consumption within their environments and where “growth” is possible and practical in those environments. “Sustainability” requires a balance of levels of consumption (and population) appropriate to those environments. It is also this balance that achieves “poverty alleviation”.

Notwithstanding this conundrum in the basic logic of the SDGs, it is also important to note that there is no clear fit of this document with other activities of the international community in regard to sustainability and the failures of those agreements in terms of setting priorities and enforcing them also is likely to occur here as with the MDGs (Amir, 2005; Hains and Cassells, 2004). Since the various competing goals and indicators are to be treated as of equal weight (SDG 17), countries and donors financing country agendas can claim that by achieving all 9 SDGs that promote growth and none of the 8 for sustainability, that they are “in fulfillment of the SDGs” even if they are actually putting countries on paths that they know to be unsustainable and that accelerate climate change. What the SDGs do, similar to the MDGs, is allow recipient countries, donors, and implementing NGOs to cherry pick items from the list that they favor, without having to consider either the overall balance or any kinds of side effects. Since the goals are themselves inconsistent with the agenda of “sustainability” or with any kind of overall balance, this “freedom” of selection is actually an invitation for chaotic and ineffective policy. The UN’s goal of trade and globalization that is enshrined in SDG 17 and expands on MDG 8, notes that, “The means of implementation targets under Goal 17 and under each Sustainable Development Goal are key to realizing our Agenda and are of equal importance with the other Goals and targets” (UN, 2015, p 10).

As with the MDGS, under the SDGs there are no challenges or changes to government planning processes that today are largely

influenced by agendas of international banks financing “development”. That means that the selection of goals will be subject to the same political pressures and decisions as under the MDGs. If the same political processes continue, without change, one can assume that the sustainable consumption goals will be de-emphasized or discarded as they were in the application of the MDGs. As the SDG document makes clear, “Each Government will also decide how these aspirational and global targets should be incorporated into national planning processes, policies and strategies” with the recognition that the priority can continue to be on increased production and consumption (UN, 2015, p. 13). Although the U.N. made it clear that the SDGs were to be accomplished at the national and regional level to pay attention to different “national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities”, the only measure they have offered for the science and logic of sustainability is in fact the goal of the international financial system (GDP) that has nothing to do with sustainability.

The problem of the SDG agenda in a nutshell is that it offers no “strategic” advice or integrated, systematic set of measures and goals, nor even guidance as to the level of application (country, community, or cultures) or beneficiaries. Even though the SDGs are described as “indivisible and interlinked” (UN, 2015, p. 32), there is no strategy of integrated development and no benchmark of human or global progress, nor reference to specific international treaties and objectives.<sup>2</sup>

In the area of sustainable development, sustainability experts recognize the need to approach ecosystems and human systems in an integrated way. Here, however, in the SDGs, the list of measures is more akin to the identification of specific species in a forest. Rather than offer approaches to protect the forest, its list is one geared to the protection of individual trees.

By analogy, if one were trying to help a group of families to recognize and prepare healthy, balanced and nutritious meals over the

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<sup>2</sup> As a document for government spending and for international intervention, SDGs lacks almost all of the professional requirements required by development agencies or governments for clear problem solving mission and strategy (Edwards and Hulme, 2002; Emmanuel, Merchant and Otley, 1990; Unterman and Davis, 1984). There is no problem statement other than a list of all of the realities of human history (inequality, violence, natural disasters, resource degradation) (UN, 2015, p. 5), no root cause analysis of problems, no analysis of previous actions and lessons learned or corrections, and no logical framework of inputs, outputs and priorities.



long-term and on their budgets, for their families, one would focus on strategies, processes, and priorities, with some clear measures. One would not simply list every potential nutritious food in a list that looked like a buffet. The SDG list is akin to this kind of a buffet.

In summary, the danger with the SDGs is that the same short-term pressures and individualist agendas that currently guide international interventions and that have exacerbated climate change and led to unsustainability, will not be addressed because there is no attempt to identify the current failures and to offer a strategic approach to confront them either at the country level or the international level. Where country governments and communities are often too weak to stand up to international pressures that undermine appropriate development and sustainability, and where communities and cultures lack the authority to hold their own governments, international development organizations, and private international actors (international investors) accountable, the SDGs does not attempt to offer any support to change this dynamic (Lempert, 2008).

Many current U.N. and other international “Action Plans” are little more than symbolism or, more cynically, fundraising tools for self-interested bureaucrats and organizations, to attract resources for the short-term treatment of symptoms rather than solving problems, and it appears that the SDGS also falls into this category (Lempert, 2014c). A standard political science analysis based on “political interests” would suggest that the organizations selected to participate in the processes designing the SDGs each had potential conflicts of interest in funding their implementation.

#### **IV. Methodology: Fundamental Principles behind the Indicators**

The main body of this article applies four different peer reviewed scientific measures to the SDGs, comparing the SDGs in four different areas to the MDGs to see how both do and to see the amount of change between the SDGs and the MDGS. Three of these tests measure compliance with the specific agreed elements of international law and the scientific elements of professionalism in the areas of intervention where both the MDGs and SDGs claim to offer solutions – sustainable development, poverty alleviation, and development, itself. A fourth, test, directly from the social science of

cultural change, tests whether the SDGs and MDGs reflect a continuation of pre-World War II colonial “development” (missionizing) policies.

Each of these measures (or “indicators”) are those published by this author -- for sustainable development (Lempert and Nguyen, 2008), for poverty alleviation (Lempert, 2015a), and for development (Lempert, 2014a) as well as for social change comparisons between the MDG agenda and French colonial “civilizing mission” policies (Lempert, 2014b) – the first three indicators are nothing more than the identification, compilation, and systematization of the key international legal elements agreed to under international law in each of the indicator areas along with accepted definitions in the scientific communities for the key concepts in the treaties in areas like sustainability science, social sciences, and management sciences (policy science, public administration, and public and private management). The first three indicators do nothing more than identify the key elements and aggregate them so that international interventions can be “scored” or “scaled” to see how many of the key, required elements, they fulfill. To assure that these indicators are consistent with the professional consensus in their fields, they have undergone careful peer review. They have also each been tested on several different interventions to demonstrate that they reveal a range of scores and to also create a baseline calibration for scoring. Each of the cited articles demonstrates this process in detail. The final indicator, measuring social change, takes a historical example of interventions from a century ago, applies a version of the indicator for “development” that is consistent with the post-World War II international treaty definitions and scientific and professional definitions for “development” and establishes the two as comparative historical baselines. These baselines can then be used to see whether contemporary interventions like the MDGs and SDGs are closer to the interventions during the era of French colonialism or to the contemporary requirements, and to score the differences.

To create indicators, I used a procedure that is well recognized both in legal analysis, for the creation of standards of proof and in “codification” of law, and in sciences and social sciences. In courts, legal determinations rest on meeting specific “elements” of proof. Similarly, scientific tests also rely on meeting specific elements of definitions. In the areas of “sustainable development”, “poverty alleviation” and “development”, there are international treaties that use these terms and that mention their

elements, but in ways that are often additive and unsystematic. The treaties also use terms from areas like sustainability science, social science, and management science but do not include the scientific definitions. What I have done is to look systematically at each of these areas and to compile the specific elements in international laws while enumerating the specific elements of sustainability science, social science and management science. The result is a set of systematic measures where before there were only ad hoc judgments. In place of competing, idiosyncratic, and often subjective critiques, I have developed more generalized, objective, consensus measures.

The methodology for extracting basic principles from laws (here, from the body of international treaties, including basic international law starting with the U.N. Charter, 1945; U.N. Genocide Convention, 1948; Rome Statute, 1998; U.N. International Declaration of Human Rights, 1948; U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989; U.N. Conference on Environment and Development, 1992; other U.N. Rights treaties, 1966 and 1966; and the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007) is used regularly by lawyers and judges when trying to find the precepts underlying laws and is referred to as “statutory analysis”. Though bodies drafting laws do not always fully define the theories and principles that they use when they reach a consensus and draft a law or a group of laws, legal scholars and judges routinely use laws and legal documents to reconstruct the underlying principles in order to apply them (Cross, 1995; Beninion, 2009; Sutherland, 2010).

In sustainability science, social science, and management sciences, the extraction of the basic principles and scientific elements is generally easier. These fields already have standardized textbooks defining terms and most of these terms have been in use for decades. For example, the basic definition of “sustainability” as a balance between production and consumption and represented by the “IPAT equation” is a long-agreed scientific standard, just as managerial accounting and strategic management principles have long been standardized. In putting these definitions into measurement indicators, I simply draw from the recognized textbooks and then confirm that they are appropriately applied through article peer review.

Note that in applying these tests to the SDGs, there is no way of knowing at this point how the SDGs will actually be implemented, if at all. However, the scoring comparisons with the MDGs are valid

because the implementation process for the SDGs is the same as that for the MDGs, and is also similar for many other contemporary international development interventions. The approach that I have used in scoring them using indicators is simply to look on paper at whether the key dimensions (the key elements used for scoring in the indicator) are referenced in the document. That says nothing about whether they are actually implementable or whether they can or will be overridden. However, since the existence of certain management procedures is also part of the scoring, the absence of specific procedures is a good proxy for the likelihood of effectiveness since successful management systems would have these procedures.

What these tests do is offer a set of basic elements and considerations that must be found in an intervention document in specific categories in order to be consistent with international law and established professional goals in that category. Since there is an assumption that use of certain terms and intent means familiarity and application of the professional standards and existing law, the SDGs likely would be scored even higher in this article than they might later be scored in practice, simply on the basis of mentioning certain intent. This means that any low scores of the SDGs should immediately raise red flags since the actual scoring of the SDGs in practice are likely to be even lower than those revealed using this methodology. This also explains why the SDGs may appear to score higher in some categories than the MDGs, even where there may be no difference in application (or where the SDGs may be worse in application). That is because the scoring of the MDGs now includes a history of how previous “goals” that were also initially just a written list, were actually implemented or not implemented, in practice.

The scores, themselves, are not “weighted” and do not offer a quantitative measure of the impacts of spending that could be used for “cost-benefit” or other spending efficiency, though it is possible that they could be used in this way in the future if “sustainability” or “sustainable poverty alleviation” or “development” could actually be quantified. The scores are just the sums of all of the required elements for each indicator. The scoring system for most of the indicators is “yes” (one point) or “no” (no points) with a “debatable” (half point) where there is insufficient information or professional agreement. In testing this scoring, I have used a wide variety of cases to assure that the scores result in a full spectrum of low to high scores to differentiate various interventions. In thinking about these tests, readers should think about them in the same way that they

think of their scores on standardized tests or on final exams in their courses. The scores, themselves, are not real or “absolute” measures. They are simply ways of differentiating various levels of achievement or aptitude for, or compliance with, whatever is being tested. The processes are not perfect and sometimes there is some variation between scorers. With more cases and more discussion, there is more consistency.

## V. Sustainable Development Test

### (i) Methodology

The scoring indicator used for the MDGs and SDGs in the area of sustainable development is based on the scientific standard for sustainability that can be found in every basic textbook on sustainability; the “IPAT” equation that balances production and consumption over the long-term (Ehrlich and Holdren, 1971). It also adds other related legal and procedural elements for sustainability planning that are found in international laws and treaties like the U.N. Genocide Convention (1948) and the Rio Declaration on Sustainable Development (1992). Note that the standard in “sustainability science”, the IPAT equation, requiring balances of consumption and production within specific environments, can be applied at both the levels of cultures and of complex societies, and this is also something found in the international treaties. The science, itself, is substantiated now with multi-disciplinary studies of historic “collapses” and adaptations where there was a failure or a recognition of these principles (Tainter, 1988; Diamond, 2005; Rankin, Bargun and Kokko, 2007). Overall, the indicator recognizes nine elements that are part of an integrated, systematic approach to “sustainable development” policy in ways that are required for accountability to the international framework and to scientific principles. Optimal and effective approaches include all nine elements (Lempert and Nguyen, 2008).

The analysis is presented directly in Table 1, with lines on the table representing each element in the test and with explanations of whether the MDGs and SDGs satisfy the conditions of these elements. For readers not familiar with that indicator or who have forgotten the basic, bedrock principles defining sustainability and the

basic international agreements, there is some attempt in the left-hand column of the Table to clarify that what is being scored with capsule summaries of these scientifically established and internationally agreed basics. On this nine point scale, with a score of seven points denoting a sustainable or partly sustainable solution and under 1.5 points an unsustainable quick fix, the best the SDGs can do with generous scoring is 5.5 points.

Table 1. Scoring of SDGs and on Sustainability Indicator

<i>Indicator Question</i>	<i>"Optimistic Outcome" Scoring of SDGs</i>
<i>I Planning framework: Implementing the commitments that countries have already made to "sustainability" and cultural protections in a systematic way:</i>	While issues are raised, there is no call for government planning frameworks at the level of National Assemblies, Parliaments, and lead Ministries (rather than line Ministries) and their counterparts in local governments, communities, and cultures, to assure that "sustainable development" is part of the long-term economic and social planning frameworks, fully integrated with and not subordinate to plans only focusing on the economic productivity or other short-term goals.
<b>Question 1.</b> The project uses the sustainability equation and tries to make predictions for balances of consumption and production to assure cultural/community/national sustainability for the next 50 years (two generations, the minimum period for projecting human cultural sustainability)?	0 points
<b>Question 2.</b> In implementing core international agreements on sustainability, the project builds a continuing government process to insure that some local governmental body uses the sustainability equation and enforces sustainable planning in public policy in a way that projects into the future and measures the four key factors in the equation?	0 points or 0.5 points. Even though SDG 12 calls for "sustainable consumption and production patterns", it does not call for planning or for balance, or for a government process to assure this. Though SDG 15 calls for "Sustainable Use of Terrestrial Eco-Systems", the indicators are really geared at industrial sustainability, with no population plan or government process other than individual family planning services for sexual health (SDG 3.7). There is no asset accounting.
<i>II Consumption patterns:</i>	No focus on consumption but possible impacts
<b>Question 3.</b> The project manages consumption so that <i>per capita wealth (or increases in per capita wealth) is not eaten up by increased population or by wasteful spending that does not improve long-term per capita well-being (health, safety and lifespan)?</i>	1 point, given the benefit of the doubt that industrialization with health and education improvements along with focus on gender equality (SDG 5) will slow population growth and there is a focus on "healthy lives" (SDG 3). There is some consumption planning in SDG 12, but no measure of population or type of consumption, only on recycling and minimizing waste. The lack of recognition of the strategic goal of balancing production and consumption and protecting resources in this way, however, essentially raises doubt about the real long-term

	population and consumption planning that is required for sustainability.
<i>III Productivity impact (economics):</i>	No actual focus on asset balance but possible impact
<b>Question 4.</b> The project results in <i>no total loss of value of per capita assets</i> (wealth) in the system?	1 point, given the benefit of the doubt of SDG’s calling for social investments such as SDG 4 (Quality Education) and concerns for health in SDGs 3 and 6.
<b>Question 5.</b> The project results in <i>long-term continuing productivity increases</i> (not just a one-time technology transfer or investment) or <i>stable per capita productivity consistent with the “TPAT equation” for sustainability in societies/cultures with growing populations and consumption?</i>	1 point, given the benefit of the doubt of SDG 8 calling for “Sustainable Economic Growth”, SDG 9 for Sustainable Industrialization and Foster Innovation
<i>IV Overall impact on global environment (the quality of assets that are protected):</i>	Some calls for protection
<b>Question 6.</b> The project <i>‘internalises’ the costs of any changes</i> (of productivity and consumption) so that any harms to the global environment are paid for and fixed with money from any benefits generated by the project?	1 point given the benefit of the doubt that SDGs calling for “sustainable use” of ecosystems will protect quality (SDG 15 to Protect Biodiversity and sustainable use of eco-systems; SDG 14 to Protect Oceans; SDG 13 Action on Climate Change)
<b>Question 7.</b> The project has <i>no negative impact on the eco-system integrity or survival?</i>	1 point given the benefit of the doubt of the multiple SDGs with discrete environmental measures such as SDG 17 on global implementation of non-implemented agreements, SDG 15 to Protect Biodiversity and sustainable use of eco-systems; SDG 14 to Protect Oceans; SDG 13 Action on Climate Change.
<i>V Impact on global cultural diversity (human aspects of development):</i>	No protections.
<b>Question 8.</b> The project <i>reflects the cultural integrity and special characteristics of each separate cultural group it affects</i> (including positive system preserving changes)?	0 points.
<b>Question 9.</b> The project <i>helps reverse any legacy of colonialism and builds new self-sufficient communities rather than reinforcing dependency?</i>	0 points.
<b>Total</b>	<b>Partial Solution: 5.5 points (with generous scoring)</b>



## **(ii) Analysis of Results for Sustainable Development Test**

Although the SDGs now give lip service to production and consumption planning, for example, there are no calls for long-term measurements and projections to effectively carry out this planning, no calls for changing consumption patterns, no calls for population planning or for any introduction of sustainability into long-term government planning. In other words, the SDGs are not including the simple, basic, recognized measures for sustainable development, even though they are certainly well-known to the international community.

A second part of sustainable development, that is enshrined in international law but has disappeared from the SDGs, is the right of indigenous peoples and other cultures to cultural protection of their production and consumption choices, within their resource bases. The protection of peoples is key to sustainable development in several ways; particularly the ability to maintain sustainability within specific eco-systems. By promoting all of the factors that would actually assimilate and destroy cultures and that are known to uproot peoples (international trade, urbanization, and growth at the national and international level), the SDGs appear to be promoting an agenda that will erase the historical knowledge of sustainability at the local level while in fact ratcheting up population and consumption in ways that are likely to destabilize societies and undermine the potential for sustainability. Again, since the fundamentals are well known to the international community, the choice not to recognize these principles in the SDGs seems to reflect a conscious agenda in the SDGs.

By putting an emphasis on homogenization of standards, on assimilation and on raising incomes rather than on protecting resources as wealth and on achieving sustainable balances within diverse cultures and choices, the SDGs actually appear to undermine many of the long recognized keys to sustainable development in the name of sustainable development.

Even without expertise in the area of sustainable development, it is easy for anyone looking at the SDGs and the scoring to understand why the SDGs do not meet either professional or internationally agreed standards for sustainable development. The real key to a sustainable development solution is to follow a simple equation that balances consumption and production within specific resource bases and to make sure that the equation is part of a government planning system so that the balance is maintained for the long-term projected future (at least two generations or 50 years), with tailoring to specific cultural groups and environments, which is also recognized in international law. The key components of consumption include population and per capita consumption choices, not just the technologies to minimize waste or increase efficiency, though these

are certainly important choices, particularly in urban, industrial cultures. The key components of production include the available resources and the technologies of production, including the long-term measures for those resources and technology. If societies choose paths of technological growth and increased consumption, they must also consider and plan their real long-term potential for new technologies and increased productivity, given that technological change for societies that are already industrial, is speculative and dependent on continuing investments and ability to create and apply new technologies.

Overall, neither the MDGs nor the SDGs appear to be doing anything more than offering very basic attention to sustainable development, with the SDGs doing only marginally better than the MDGs. Neither achieves a solution that is in line with international agreements such as the Rio Declaration (UN, 1992) or international rights conventions or professional measures.

## VI. Poverty Alleviation Test

The technology of poverty alleviation draws from both management science and social science. Effective, long-term, poverty alleviation requires addressing root causes and achieving social changes that go well beyond the treating of the symptoms of poverty or inequality by simply transferring existing resources and technology (Lewis, 1969; Gunder Frank, Cochroft, and Johnson, 1972; Wallerstein, 1979; Cloward and Piven, 1993; Rank, Yoon, Hirschl, 2003; Picketty, 2014). The measurement indicator used here draws from the consensus in international law on definitions of “poverty alleviation” as something different from “development” and not a substitute for it (U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, Articles 6, 27; U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 2 and 8). It also recognizes the use of management science principles in addition to social science (Barry, 1984; Bryson, 1988; Edwards and Hulme, 2002; Garrison, Noreen and Brewer, 2005).

Given some of the technical complexities of assuring real long-term poverty alleviation, addressing root causes rather than treating symptoms, the measurement indicator used here to test the SDGs relative to the MDGs includes some 12 elements (Lempert, 2015a). They are divided into three categories, with six elements for reducing “absolute” poverty in order to meet basic needs (Streeten, et. al., 1981), two elements for reducing “relative” poverty and inequality through efforts to assure equal opportunity and redistribution consistent with international rights treaties, and four elements to recognize many of the pitfalls that occur in anti-poverty programs such as forced relocations, forced urbanization, enforced economic choices and trade regimes on local communities, and other activities that are in violation of international laws like the Genocide Convention (1948) and Rome Statutes (1998), as well as international declarations and treaties for respecting cultural choices and protecting cultural integrity such as the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) and the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) as well as basic rights treaties following the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Although there are only these 12 elements, the reality in international development interventions is that many communities and peoples are now harmed by “development” policies that force them off of their lands and disrupt their lifestyles. That means that the international community not only recognizes these essential elements in “poverty alleviation” but also recognizes that there is an affirmative duty, under international law, to protect against the harms. This means that four elements there is both a positive value in poverty alleviation for the inclusion of the element as well as a duty to assure that rights are protected and that harms do not occur. So these elements can be scored twice, once for their inclusion

(a positive score) and once on whether they take protective precautions (no score if they do, since this is a duty in the international system, but loss of a point if they don't). This means that the full range of potential scoring in this category is 16 total points, or a spectrum ranging from (-4) points to 12 points.

The scoring of the MDGs and SDGs in the area of poverty alleviation is presented on Table 2. For readers not familiar with the principles of poverty reduction, there is some attempt in the left-hand column to clarify what is being scored using capsule summaries. For this indicator, an absence of professionalism in the first four of the categories is scored as negligence creating harm and one point can be subtracted (a score of (-1) in calculating the scoring. The full scale ranges from (-4) points to 12 points. On this 16 point scale, with a score of 10-12 points denoting true poverty reduction, 6.5-9.5 points as strong approaches that may lack attention to sustainability or cultural protection, 0-6 points as partial solutions that may endanger individuals or cultures in the name of equity, and (-4) to 0 points as failed approaches to poverty reduction with a conflicting agenda that promotes harms in violation of established rights under international law.

Table 2. Scoring of SDGs Compared to MDGs on Poverty Alleviation Indicator

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Scoring of MDGs</i>	<i>Scoring of SDGs</i>
<b><i>I. Exploring the Choice of Agenda:</i></b>	<i>The ideology of the UN system remains one of promoting globalization and industrialization in which quick generation of income is to be partly diverted to the poor, who are turned into workers for the global system even as their cultures and environments are destroyed. There is lip service to sustainable production and consumption and to rights concerns, which marginally raises the scoring on the MDGs (-4) points, to (-3) points for the SDGs.</i>	
<i>1. Protection of sustainable cultures?</i>	No. Although the UN treaties on Genocide and the Rio Declaration explicitly recognize cultures as the basic unit for sustainable development and while they recognize “sovereignty”, all of their measures are at the country level with governments, and even at that level there is no focus on sustainability. <i>(-1) points.</i>	Same or worse. There is not a single mention of “culture”, “cultural survival” or “community” in the SDGs and the goal seems to be to promote a single national and global industrial plan and approach (SDG 17, 12, 8). <i>(-1) points.</i>
<i>2. Sovereignty of cultures in their eco-systems without foreign conflicts of interest?</i>	The UN system’s agenda based on the MDGs is intertwined with trade and with growth, in promoting the agenda of globalism and working directly with “development” banks as well as in “partnerships” with business. It does not challenge government agendas to disrupt cultures and push peoples into the global economy as the approach to “poverty reduction”. <i>(-1) points.</i>	Same or worse. The agenda of globalization and standardization is now enshrined in SDG 17. <i>(-1) points.</i>
<i>3. Root Causes (political and social) of absolute and relative poverty are addressed?</i>	The UN system’s project documents no longer require problem tree analysis and examination of root causes but simply offer “situation analyses” that usually report on GDP and “growth” in line with international bank agendas. There is a reluctance to address political inequality and oppression since the UN system essentially sees government elites that may cause the inequalities as its “partners”.	Same. There is no mention at all of root causes of poverty and inequality. On the positive side are suggestions that participation and transparency would help (SDG 16), but the SDGs that specifically target inequality (SDG 10, 1, 2) make no mention of the need for income redistribution, social solidarity, or reduced consumption of the rich, loss of lands and eco-systems and cultural practices and rights of

	<i>(-1) points.</i>	minority cultures, or of the problems of the power and non-transparency of international economic and political institutions that are further empowered and that are the real source of power in lesser developed countries (SDG 17). <i>(-1) points</i>
<i>4. Protection of human dignity (assuring protections of human rights, land rights, and community integrity in accordance with the Rome Statutes,, 1998)?</i>	In implementing the MDGs, the UN defines its measures as income and growth without commitment to diversity and full rights protections. <i>(-1) points.</i>	While the approach does not consider cultures, consumption choices, or population, SDG proponents would argue that they will deal with resource protections and sustainability (SDG 12), that they have introduced political concerns (SDG 16) and that they do not directly conduct genocide through extermination. <i>(0) points</i>
<b>II. Achieving Sustainable, Long-Term (Absolute) Poverty Reduction (Total)</b>	<i>Though the UN treaties and statements may give lip service to sustainable poverty reduction, the UN system (UNDP) itself admits that poverty reduction is coming at the expense of the environment, that it requires continued "growth" (that is likely unsustainable) and that it does no long term sustainability planning. People remain vulnerable and poverty may simply be postponed, with a quick attention to symptoms and perhaps simply "regulating the poor" as a form of short term political control. The SDGs actually encourage "poor" countries to opt out of sustainability concerns and to focus on short-term poverty reduction as they urbanize and assimilate into the global economy.</i> <i>0 points</i>	
<i>5. The focus is on long-term per capita wealth, not on short term incomes?</i>	No. The UNDP, for example, makes clear that "per capita GDP", a measure of short term income, fueled by "growth" is its goal. Though the environment is to be protected as one of the MDGs, there is no accounting for the value of environmental assets as wealth. <i>0 points.</i>	Same or worse. There is not a single per capita measure of assets or call for asset accounting, while attention continues to be on incomes (SDG 8). <i>0 points.</i>
<i>6. Culturally appropriate consumption is promoted?</i>	No. The UNDP uses the Human Development Index, that focuses on a single standard of consumption, and it addresses poverty not through changed consumption but through "growth" in productivity.	Same. Despite the many mentions of "sustainable consumption" (SDG 12), the goal is a single industrialized economy (SDG 17) that continues to "grow" (SDG 1, 8) and industrialize (SDG 9) with no one "left behind"

	<i>0 points.</i>	(unassimilated) (SDG 10). <i>0 points</i>
<i>7. Culturally appropriate production is promoted?</i>	No. There is no protection of traditional economic activities and the UN system often includes funding specifically to change attitudes in order to promote production for globalization. <i>0 points.</i>	Same or worse. The SDGs call for replacing traditional production with a single industrial standard (SDG 17) including industrial agriculture (SDG 2). <i>0 points.</i>
<i>8. Culturally appropriate and sustainable population policies are part of the approach?</i>	No. Although the UN system includes the UNFPA, its arm for population, and may offer family planning as part of women's health, there is no demographic sustainability planning. <i>0 points.</i>	Same or worse. Population is not mentioned anywhere in the SDGs. Nor is per capita protection of assets mentioned, despite all of the mentions of "sustainable consumption". The focus is on "growth" (SDG 8). <i>0 points.</i>
<i>9. Equitable (political rights) protections for cultures are promoted?</i>	No. The UN system takes a narrow view of genocide and intervenes only in civil wars when deaths are occurring, not to protect cultures in other respects. <i>0 points.</i>	Same or worse. The only political protections mentioned (SDG 16) are for individuals for "inclusive" societies, not cultural protection and survival. <i>0 points.</i>
<i>10. Equitable (promotion of identity) protections for cultures are highlighted?</i>	No. While UNESCO has the mandate to protect culture and sometimes does now protect local languages, it seems to see language protection as a key to promoting globalization, and heritage protection as a way to promote tourism, rather than to protect identity and pride of cultures. <i>0 points.</i>	Same or worse. There is a mention of global cultural heritage protection (SDG goal 11.4) but not a single mention of cultural protection. The SDGs seek to urbanize (SDG 9) and assimilate (SDG 17). <i>0 points.</i>
<b>III. Eliminating Relative Poverty by Promoting Equity:</b>	<i>The UN system rarely considers political and institutional or social changes to promote equity, given that it works directly with government elites, but some of its impacts do create a partial leveling effect. There is little new under the SDGs.</i> <i>1 point</i>	
<i>11. Impact on opportunity and equity for individuals?</i>	Debatable. Although the gini coefficient is not used, some UN system interventions do look at tax structures and at distributions, even though UNDP projects may actually be subsidizing the wealthy and cementing or skewing inequalities.	Same. Although SDG 10 now calls for reducing inequality, it is through employment for the poor and technology transfer/homogenization of cultures, not through taxation, social justice or protections. <i>0.5 points.</i>

	<i>0.5 points.</i>	
<i>12. Reliance on human rights based approaches to promote opportunity and equity for individuals?</i>	<p>Debatable. The UN system, including UN Women and UNICEF, does promote opportunities for women in an urban, industrial system and sometimes pushes for more educational opportunity and legal access, though it has never called for equal education or equal access to lawyers anywhere and simply seems to create a floor with some basics for the poor rather than real equity.</p> <p><i>0.5 points.</i></p>	<p>Same. Although SDG 4 calls for equitable education and SDG 16 calls for equal justice, the specific indicators do not show clear human rights based approaches in institutional changes in law and politics to ensure enforcement.</p> <p><i>0.5 points</i></p>
<b>Total:</b>	<p><b>The indicator reveals the UN system as essentially treating some short term symptoms of poverty while covering up larger systemic problems, in a way that destroys cultural diversity and promotes globalization. The approach to poverty reduction is unsustainable.</b></p> <p><b>(-3) points.</b></p>	<p><b>There is almost no difference in the short term approach to poverty with the MDGs, and the ideologies of urbanization and short-term treatment of symptoms are even stronger. SDG proponents say that the recognition of the environment is, itself, a marginal improvement but symbolism, alone, without the guidance and infrastructure for results, in what is an action document, is a sign, itself, of failure.</b></p> <p><b>(-2) points</b></p>

**(i) Analysis of Results for Poverty Alleviation Test**

Almost everything in the MDG and SDG approach to poverty reduction fails to meet international legal and professional standards. There is no attention to root causes of poverty or to institutional (political system) or cultural changes. Without attention to the recognized elements of poverty reduction, the long-term result of the MDGs and SDGs is likely to generate poverty by promoting increases in population and by destabilizing environments and cultures. The focus is on quick, short-term transfers and growth that experts see as a postponement of poverty through quick and temporary solutions. Although this was one of the major critiques of the MDGs (Maxwell, 2003; Van Norren, 2012), it remains unaddressed in the SDGs.



Neither the SDGs nor the MDGs promote any kind of income distribution or political power distribution, nor do they offer any targets of income inequality. Concerns of relative poverty and inequality are not even on the agenda of the SDGs, although these were also among key critiques of the MDGs (Bond, 2006; Fukuda-Parr, 2010; Saith, 2007; Kabeer, 2010).

The approach of both the SDGs and the MDGs to poverty reduction is not to balance populations in their resource bases, nor to measure assets and seek to increase per capita wealth. Nor is it to help cultures maintain balances with their resources, which one might expect would be highlighted in the SDGs. The approach, as underlined by SDGs 1 and 17, to promote trade and uniform consumption standards of urban, industrial societies, as well as to rely on GDP as its basic measure, appears to be to promote globalization, inviting foreign investors to offer technological “growth” and provide “jobs” for globally selected work for the poor, so that their incomes rise. Rather than focus on helping to maintain these incomes and wealth, the lack of population planning risks that expanded population of the poor will lead to rapid depletion of resources and a return to poverty, with continued dependency on outsiders to provide additional technology and solutions. In reality, much of the rise of GDP in developed countries has come with increased resource exploitation and inequality (Lempert, 2015a). Two key assumptions underlying the SDGs, in violation of international human rights treaties that protect the rights of indigenous peoples to protect their cultures and offering unconfirmed social science, are that developing countries will industrialize their indigenous peoples and undergo a demographic transition that will slow population growth to levels that are sustainable (or that something else will naturally reduce fertility). Even if these changes were not in violation of international law, demographic transitions are gradual and just slowing population growth does not assure sustainability without some kind of planning.

Though (absolute) poverty and hunger appear to be the key goals of the SDGs as they were the main focus of the MDGs, the short-term approaches to treating symptoms reflect an approach that sociologists have long called “regulating the poor” (Cloward and Piven, 1973) and that many of the critics of the MDGs, cited above, suggested reflected a globalist or “neo-liberal” (or, perhaps, “neo-colonial” agenda) in the MDGs. Although the U.N. system and the World Bank make claims that they are eradicating global poverty, other data, including that within the U.N. itself, from the Food and Agricultural Organization, suggest that growing populations and stress on global resources are actually leading to increased undernourishment and to greater vulnerability of larger numbers of peoples whose transition “out of poverty” is short-term and

precarious (FAO, 2012). Indeed, this was the very reason why there were pressures to focus on “sustainable development” as the replacement for the MDG agenda.

The result of testing the MDGs and SDGs through this indicator suggests that the international community is substituting a globalization agenda in the name of poverty reduction; resurrecting the claims of classic political economists that are using the developing world as an opportunity to expand markets (Hobson, 1902) and/or take advantage of increasing populations and poverty for cheap labor (Marx, 1867).

In short, neither the MDGs or SDGs focus on either long-term solutions to absolute poverty nor to any changes in relative inequality that are in line with international rights conventions or professional measures.

## VII. Development Law Accountability Test

The measurement indicator for “development” comes entirely out of the body of international treaties almost universally adopted by member states of the U.N. It compiles all of the different statements on the goals and purposes of “development” that are found in these documents, dating from the U.N. Declaration (1948) and then reappearing in international laws, fundamental rights declarations and later conventions and declarations such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and more recently in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007). This indicator simply organizes and systematizes the elements of human development on which the international community has continually agreed.

Overall, international law and treaties have recognized 13 different elements that compromise human development, in four different levels: the individual level (6), the level of society (3), the community and cultural level (1) and the global level (3). They include everything from moral, spiritual, and mental health development at the individual level, to promotion of peace and cultural and community protections, as well as political equality, at the higher levels. It is easy to list them in the categories and to use these 13 elements in an indicator that tests whether any comprehensive strategy for “development” actually incorporates the full spectrum in which the international community defines “development”.

The list of these 13 elements and the scoring of the MDGs and SDGs in the area of development is presented on Table 3, using this 13 element test for development interventions (Lempert, 2014a). Although most development organizations only target one or two areas of development, this scoring indicator can be used on those agencies or agendas that claim to offer a full and comprehensive approach to development, as the U.N. claims with the SDGs and claimed with the MDGs. For readers not familiar with that indicator, there is some attempt in the left-hand column to present capsule summaries of these different areas of development to clarify what is being scored. The method used for scoring using this table is not just whether an organization mentions an area of development, since that would simply be a score on rhetoric but whether there are specific contemplated actions in the form of active steps that go beyond mere platitudes and are not contradicted by other actions. Where there is doubt, a half point can be offered as the score for a category, rather than a full point or no point. In interpreting this measurement indicator, a total score of 13 fully fulfills the international community’s various treaty goals for development, one of more than 6.5 points is a strong attempt to meet aspirations of humanity, 3-6

points is a partial solution that may endanger individuals or cultures in some way, and less than 3 points represents a focus on goals that do not meet the U.N.'s mandate defining "development".

Table 3. Universally Recognized Aspirations for Development and the International Community's Recognition of Them through the Millennium Development Goals

**1. Individual Development Objectives:**

<i>Elements</i>	<i>Response of the International Community through the MDGs</i>	<i>Changes in the SDGs</i>
1. Physical (body) development:	Limited in recipients and in applications. Current MDG 1 (on poverty and hunger) partly addresses basic animal needs as do MDGs 4, 5 and 6 that focus on basic health (infant and child health, maternal health, and HIV/AIDS) but the approach of the MDGs is just to support minimal physical development of "the poor" and then to stop. <i>0.5 points .</i>	Partly expanded but only partly fulfilled. The focus is still on hunger and poverty in SDGs 1 and 2 and basic animal health needs through SDG 3, though SDG 3 now expands the idea of health to that of "healthy lives" and "well-being" for all ages. The focus is on disease, toxins, accidents, and access to health care and partly on addictions, but not on exercise, diet, recreation and preventative health. <i>0.5 points .</i>
2. Mental development:	Dubious. Current MDG 2 (primary education) promotes top-down universal primary State schooling (with curriculum set by national authorities and with international goals) for those not yet subject to it or excluded from it, but such schooling often destroys cultures and traditional education, skills, and respect for local environments, language, history and values. It is not responsive to individual desires and does not seek to improve mental development of the vast majority. <i>0.5 points .</i>	Slight improvement but only partly fulfilled. The approach is still one of State schooling and productivity, though there is now an expansion of education for "lifelong learning" (SDG 4) and fostering of innovation but apparently just for economic production and not for any other human abilities and desires (SDG 9). There is still no protection of culture, traditional education and skills. There is now some concern for environmental education but not geared to protecting cultures in ecosystems (SDG 12). There is the first mention of mental health in target SDG 3.4. <i>0.5 points .</i>
3. Spiritual (appreciation of natural world) development:	Abandoned. Current MDG 7 (on the environment) promotes green space (land devoted to forest and parks) and lowering of pollutants but does not change the attitudes or policies that have led to environmental damage because of the loss of spiritual	Dubious. One of the 169 targets (in SDG 12) now includes environmental awareness education, but awareness is different from creating a love of nature and appreciation of human integration with it. The focus is still on exploiting nature for "growth" (SDG 8) and "sustainable use" (SDGs 14 and 15).

	appreciation for nature. <i>0 points.</i>	<i>0.5 points.</i>
4. Moral (appreciation of others as individuals) development:	Abandoned. <i>0 points.</i>	Same: Abandoned. There is now lip service to this in SDG 16, for “inclusive societies” but there is no target for empathy, social solidarity, empowerment or ethical and moral action. <i>0 points.</i>
5. Social (appreciation of community) development:	Abandoned. <i>0 points.</i>	Same: Abandoned. <i>0 points.</i>
6. Cultural (appreciation of one’s identity) development:	Abandoned and Contradicted by MDG 2 (primary schooling) that generally works to assimilate cultures and substitute traditional education with State directed classroom education promoting the history, language, culture and goals of the dominant national groups. <i>0 points.</i>	Same: Abandoned and contradicted by State schooling (SDG 4), global industrialization (SDG 9), and globalization and technology transfer (SDG 17) to assimilate and homogenize cultures under the slogan of “no one left behind” (i.e., “no one left unassimilated”). There is only lip service to “appreciation of cultural diversity” in SDG 4.7. <i>0 points.</i>

## 2. Societal Level Development Objectives::

<i>Elements</i>	<i>Response of the International Community through the MDGs</i>	<i>Changes in the SDGs</i>
7. Social equity/ Social progress/ Equal opportunity for individuals	Dubious. Current MDG 1 (poverty and hunger) focuses on the lower 25% but tries to resolve inequity through productivity and cultural destruction to generate short-term income increases for the “poor”, rather than through empowerment or distributional equity policies (e.g., higher taxation on the rich and legal protection of merit-based systems and choice) without any social solidarity and changes in distribution of opportunity; Current MDG 3 (gender equality) tries to achieve equality in the area of gender, only, and in ways that do not protect traditional cultures and do not deal with any inequities to males	Same: Dubious. The rhetoric again calls for various forms of equality for competition in industrial societies (SDG 4 for inclusive and equitable education but without any means of assuring it; SDG 5 for gender equality) and some increase in calls for political rights and oversight of government (SDG 10 and 16), but no calls for oversight of the real actors who are creating global inequalities (multinationals, major military powers, international banks, donors and development organizations), or for taxation of the rich and solidarity. The ideology is equality through growth and jobs, working for the wealthy (SDG 8) rather than empowerment and redistribution. <i>0.5 points.</i>

	or underlying causes of gender inequity (e.g., militarization and violence). <i>0.5 points.</i>	
8. Political equity/ Equal rights for individuals:	Abandoned other than for women through MDG 3 (gender equality) and without addressing underlying causes of gender inequity or inequities faced by men. <i>0 points.</i>	Some expanded mention but not likely to have impact. Gender equality is still mentioned under SDG 5 and SDG 16 mentions “access to justice”, transparency and accountability, but only of local actors, and with no clear targets or approaches. The hint is that it may be intended just to open the door to international business and top-down enforcement rather than citizen rights and empowerment. <i>0.5 points.</i>
9. Peace/ Tolerance/ Demilitarization for individuals:	Abandoned. <i>0 points.</i>	Same: Abandoned. There is a goal of decreasing violence against women but this is a call for policing, not for demilitarization (SDG 16). SDG 4.7 mentions education for “promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence” as in all U.N. documents, with no specifics. <i>0 points.</i>

**3. Cultural/ Community Level Development Objectives:**

<i>Elements</i>	<i>Response of the International Community through the MDGs</i>	<i>Changes in the SDGs</i>
10. Sustainability/ (sovereignty) of cultures:	Abandoned and Contradicted by MDG 8 (promoting global partnerships) that promotes trade and technology transfer to the detriment of resource protections and sustainability. <i>0 points.</i>	Same: Abandoned and contradicted by SDG 17 to promote globalization and SDG 9 to promote global industrialization and homogenization. <i>0 points.</i>

**4. Global Development Objectives:**

<i>Elements</i>	<i>Response of the International Community through the MDGs</i>	<i>Changes in the SDGs</i>
11. Social equity/ Social progress/ Equal opportunity of cultures:	Abandoned and Contradicted by MDG 8 (promoting global partnerships) and MDG 2	Same: Abandoned and Contradicted by SDG 17. The goal of reducing inequality “within and among

	(primary education) that work to industrialize, urbanize and homogenize cultures in their production and consumption rather than to promote diversity and equity between them. <i>0 points.</i>	countries” (SDG 10) is focused only on individuals through “employment and decent work for all” and “growth” (SDG 8), technology transfer and urbanization (SDG 9) to undermine cultures. <i>0 points.</i>
12. Political equity/ Equal rights for cultures:	Abandoned and Contradicted by MDG 8 (promoting global partnerships) and MDG 2 (primary education) that work to urbanize and homogenize cultures rather than to promote diversity and equity between them. <i>0 points.</i>	Same: Abandoned and contradicted by SDG 17. The mentions of government accountability and justice in SDG 16 make no mention of federalism, cultural autonomy, indigenous peoples or community rights and appear geared only to individual and business rights. <i>0 points.</i>
13. Peace/ Tolerance/ Demilitarization for protection of cultures:	Undermined. Current MDG 8 (promoting global partnerships) tries to do this through homogenization and a single, top-down approach to globalization in ways that actually destabilize cultures and long term prospects for peace (Lempert and Nguyen, 2011). <i>0 points.</i>	Same as MDGs: Undermined by SDGs 17 and 9 to create a global urban mono-culture with a single technology. <i>0 points.</i>

### Overall Scoring of the MDGs and SDGs

	<i>Response of the International Community through the MDGs</i>	<i>Changes in the SDGs</i>
<b>Total Scoring on 13 Elements</b>	<i>0 (if strict scoring) – 1.5 (if lenient scoring for physical and mental development and equality).</i> The first and third goals do promote development in <i>industrial countries</i> but that is not the target for these interventions. <b>This does not meet the international legal definition of development</b>	<i>1 (if strict scoring) – 2.5 (if lenient scoring as with MDGs).</i> This is slightly better than the MDGs, with partial (0.5) points for spiritual development and political equality but not the full score (1.0) for each. <b>This does not meet the international legal definition of development.</b>

### **(i) Analysis of Results for Development Law Accountability Test**

Despite their universal recognition, almost none of the international community's 13 recognized "universal" goals for development appear in any meaningful ways in either the MDGs or SDGs.

Although the international community essentially seeks to define development and set its targets through the SDGs, neither the MDGs nor the SDGs actually meet these already existing definitions of development that are established in the very bedrock laws and rights treaties of the U.N. system or that are recognized by people now alive on our planet. Several critics noted the failures of the MDGs to follow the universal development agenda (Kabeer, 2010; Denoulin and Shahani, 2009; Saith, 2006; Hill, Mansour and Claudio, 2010; Waage, Banerji, Campbell, Chirwa, Collender, Dieltiens and Unterhalter, 2010).

The focus of the MDGs and SDGs is a very narrow one that seems to view human beings only on the level of animals with physical and economic needs (Streeten, et. al, 1981) but without any other attributes of culture, society, morality of spirituality. There is no concern at all for human cultures, for global peace, for social solidarity, or for real equality and equity, other than lip service. This is a narrow and cynical view of humanity.

The score of the MDGs and SDGs on this indicator suggests that something has gone seriously wrong in procedures in the U.N. system for linking its mandate and its international treaties to actionable goals. It suggests that a small group of leaders has redefined "development" for some other agenda outside of the U.N. system's legal mandate for development and human progress. It suggests that they have substituted a narrow economic and animalistic vision focusing on production and things for the rich vision of development goals that is actually the international consensus under international laws and treaties.



## VIII. Cultural Change Test: Comparison with Colonial Policy

Social scientists continually search for ways of measuring social and cultural change. This measurement indicator, on cultural change in development approaches, offers a way to compare current approaches to development intervention, like the MDGs and SDGs, with approaches that are recognized as “colonial policy” of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The test used here takes the previous measurement indicator, for “development”, using the post-World War II consensus in international treaties defining the elements of “development”, and generates an historical measure using historical information on French colonialism in Southeast Asia and scoring it using this same indicator. It then compares the two approaches to see if there are commonalities. Placing the MDGs and SDGs alongside the comprehensive measure of “development” using the elements in the treaties, and alongside the historical measure for French colonialism, allows for inferences on whether the MDGs and SDGs represent “progress” or “regress”.

Since a previous article by this author then took the next step, of examining the MDGs and looking for direct corollaries in colonial interventions in a specific case, using historical data from the French colonial era in Southeast Asia, this baseline can be used again here to see if there have been any changes in approach in the SDGs. The same table can be used from the previous study, this time incorporating information from the SDGs (Lempert, 2015a).

Table 4 presents the eight MDGs and 17 SDGs together, by categories (similar to those used in Table A1 in the Annex) in the left hand column. The right hand column looks to see if there is a direct parallel to them in the religious missionization and “civilizing mission” of French colonialism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, using and expanding the test presented in a previous article (Lempert, 2015a). The data on the French period comes from the author’s research on French colonialism in the countries of Southeast Asia over a 15 year period and draws both on ethnographic historical data and historic materials that define the system of French colonialism (e.g., Logan and Askew, 1994; Jamieson, 1993).

While history is too often forgotten or distorted (or demonized) beyond recognition so as to make it difficult to compare with the present day, the logic of human cultures is to protect continuity over time. During the French colonial era, colonial administrators did use their power to commercial advantage in extracting resources, manipulating economies, destroying cultures, and exploiting markets and labor, but they also looked for ways to assure “sustainable use” (using the words now in the SDGs) of their colonies. Such “sustainable use” required making investments in

public health, education and economic infrastructure. Indeed, during the colonial period, the French built hospitals, schools, and urban infrastructure in Southeast Asia. French colonial administrators promoted clean water (to treat epidemics), transferred technology, brought modern forms of energy (electricity), and created jobs (that served their interest) to raise the levels of the poor. They also brought in concepts of local democracy (participatory councils), built parks and museums, and announced several political rights including an end to enslavement of minorities.

Table 4. Colonial Origins of the Millennium Development Goals: French Colonial Interventions

<i>Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Measures</i>	<i>Analysis of French Colonial “Civilizing Mission” Activities on the basis of whether their Approach is Continued in the MDGs/SDGs and their Implementation (“Yes”) or a Break with Colonialism (“No”) (Using Indochina, 1860 – 1945)</i>
MDG 1. End Poverty and Hunger, including increasing the share of the lowest 25% SDG 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere (guaranteed minimum incomes) SDG 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and <i>promote sustainable agriculture</i>	Yes, the MDGs and SDGs continue the French colonial approach to poverty reduction as part of their “civilizing mission”: promoting small business and export crops to serve European needs and building sanitation systems, irrigation systems and roads along with schools, and using community labor for investment to combat “poverty”. Treatment of minorities imposed the same leveling effect as today, including abolition of slavery to protect the lowest 25%. The focus was on production without concern for sustainability or wealth protection.
MDG 2. Offer Universal Education (at the primary school level) SDG 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all	Yes, the MDGs and SDGs continue the French colonial approach of top-down State education to train the lower classes for service and to break their traditional customs and economies. The French introduced community schools (same as the State schools of today for nation building and symbol manipulating skills) to promote French literacy and to unify the areas under their control and replace local autonomy.
MDG 3. Gender Equality SDG 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls	Partly, yes, the MDGs and SDGs continue the French goal of creating the same gender relations in the colonies as in France, which at that time was moving towards equality in order to place women in factories. The French created schools for girls as well as for boys. Though the concepts of equality were different from today, the idea was to create the same gender relations in the colonies as in Europe, including protections of women through French legal codes.
MDG 4. Child Health (reduce infant	Yes, the MDGs and SDGs continue the French

<p>mortality) SDG 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages</p>	<p>approach to health in their colonies. Health care was a key goal of French Missionary activities and associated hospitals as well as of specific health institutes like the Pasteur Institutes. The French promoted vaccines and sanitation campaigns much like the MDGs and SDGs.</p>
<p>MDG 5. Maternal Health SDG 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages</p>	<p>The mother and child hospitals were a key to the hospital and health systems introduced by the French in their colonies. The French symbol was that of Mary and Baby Jesus.</p>
<p>MDG 6. Combat HIV/AIDS SDG 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages</p>	<p>Though there was no HIV/AIDS in French times, there was venereal disease and the French established special clinics (e.g., Hanoi) for soldiers and local prostitutes to receive treatment.</p>
<p>MDG 7. Environmental Sustainability: species protection, lowering of ozone and CO<sub>2</sub> levels. SDG 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts SDG 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all SDG 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development SDG 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss SDG 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns, “taking into account the development and capabilities of developing countries”</p>	<p>Partly, yes, the current approach to the environment in the MDGs and SDGs had its roots in French colonialism, though there was no concept then of “sustainability”. The idea of clean water and sanitation was one of the central development interventions in French colonialism. The French colonial approach to “sustainability” and the environment was almost exactly that of the MDGs and SDGs in that there was no valuation of assets, no attention to population growth (which French “development” caused to skyrocket as a major fuel of poverty and dissent), and no planning. The focus was on water sanitation and parks, efficient waste disposal and recycling systems. The French environmental consciousness was limited to aesthetics (landscaping and gardens) and efficiency in a way that is analogous to the MDG and SDG approach to symptoms rather than root causes of overuse of resources and environmental damage.</p>
<p>MDG 8. Global Partnership: rule based trade and finance, sustainable debts; technology transfer, good governance, debt relief SDG 17. Strengthen the means of implementation through technology transfer and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development, treating all the goals and indicators as of equal weight.</p>	<p>Yes, the French colonial idea of technology transfer (building technical schools and institutes, offering scholarship and work permits to France, to turn colonies into models of contemporary French production and consumption) and “civilizing” the locals was all based on a concept of globalization/ French “civilizing” mission that promoted trade and assimilation, as do the MDGs and SDGs.</p>
<p><i>Increased Resource Exploitation and Consumption to “Reduce Poverty”</i></p>	
<p>SDG 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all</p>	<p>Yes, the SDG goal of access to “modern energy” was exactly what French colonialism did in introducing electrification to its colonies, building roads for cars,</p>

	rail lines and steam ships.
SDG 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth (of at least 7%/year in Lesser Developed Countries), full and productive employment and decent work for all	Yes, the SDG goal of “growth” and employment directly follows the French approach of mobilizing “corvee” labor for public works, creating “employment” in colonial industries, and growing productivity and extractive industries to serve foreign markets with local labor placed in the formal, export sector to “grow” production and exports with no concern for local culture, asset protection, or per capita wealth.
SDG 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation	Yes, the SDG approach to innovation and urbanization reflects the French colonial model of urbanizing their colonies and building technical and vocational schools and universities as well as institutes. In many cases, the French went beyond what countries do today under the New World Order in promoting local innovation.
SDG 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries (through increased income and consumption of the poor)	Yes, the SDG approach to “equality” through wage labor jobs and laws to eliminate slavery without any taxation or solidarity with French and local elites supported by the French, is a direct continuation of French colonialism.
SDG 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable with more housing, transportation	Yes, the French created replicas of Paris in their colonies, with urban cities that had parks, French style houses for different classes, trains, steamboats and street cars, and electric lights and this is continued directly in the SDGs. In many cases, the French went beyond what countries do today under the New World Order, to beautify their colonial cities.
<i>Security, Policing, Law, and Democracy (?)</i>	
SDG 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels	Yes, the SDG concept of “peace” and “justice” are exactly those of imposed hierarchical pacification and local participatory government under international control that were the hallmark of French colonialism. The French eliminated slavery under the banner of rights, trained local militias to maintain order, and created local self-governing parliaments. However, they did not allow any challenge to their hegemony: military, financial and cultural or any real empowerment, cultural autonomy, or challenge to their single order, which is reflected exactly in the SDGs.
<b>Total</b>	5 or 6 of the 8 MDGs and 12 of the 17 SDGs appear to be taken <i>directly</i> from the French colonial model while the remaining 2 or 3 of the MDGs and 5 of the SDGs, that are more time specific concepts of gender and environmental protection, seem entirely consistent with the French colonial ideology for “civilizing” the natives. In some cases, the attention the French spent on restoring cultural monuments, building libraries and museums, establishing universities and offering scholarships, and teaching the ideals of the French Revolution (equality and liberty/democratic self-rule

	and human rights) may have actually been closer to the broad goals of development in international treaties than the SDGs are today.
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### **(i) Analysis of Results for Cultural Change Test**

Indeed, French colonialism included everything that is now in the SDGs and calling it a “civilizing mission” while at the same time overseeing policies that were exploitative, destructive, unsustainable and leading the world on the path to colonial revolts and to world war.

What Table 6 shows is that the MDGs and now the SDGs are in almost exact parallel to the model of European colonialism in every significant way, though with some changes to reflect new technological conditions. The ideology of European colonialism seems to have fully asserted itself in the SDGs, though now in the form of globalization and what some term “neo-colonialism”.

Comparing both the MDGs and SDGs to the “civilizing mission” of European imperialism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century helps to suggest what the agendas are that have replaced the international consensus on “development”, the legal and professional requirements of “sustainable development” and of “poverty reduction” even while claiming to meet all of these, and from where these agendas apparently stem. The MDGs and SDGs appear to be a reassertion of colonialism and the policies that led to World War II, even though the international community established its treaties and laws specifically to try to avert this in the early post-World War II period.

This seems to confirm what has been one of the major critiques of international development for decades (Baran and Sweezy, 1968; Gunder Frank, Cochroft and Johnson, 1972; Prebisch, 1949; Wallerstein, 1979; Klein, 2007) using what may be one of the first recognized measures to test the critique. Even major economists have expressed dismay at how the agenda of international banks has seemed to be to promote inequalities and dependency rather than to promote independence and sustainability (Stiglitz, 2002).

This also appears to confirm one of the major critiques of the MDGs; that it was top-down and in the interests of stakeholders in the developed countries (international banks, governments and implementing organizations) but not the stakeholder beneficiaries (Fukuda-Parr, 2010; Saith, 2007; Bond, 2006; International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty, 2015; Haines and Cassells, 2004).

## IX. Conclusion

All of the tests of the SDGs offered in this article suggest that the international community has veered sharply from its international legal consensus and scientific standards on “development”, “poverty reduction” and “international development” and that the U.N. system, itself has failed to follow its own legal mandate. Instead, the SDGs are promoting an agenda similar to that of European colonialism, more than a century ago. The question is, why?

Development experts, including the former head of the UNDP, Gustave Speth, have been warning the international community to immediately reject the approach that is being taken (Speth, 2008; Korten, 2007). Critics of the MDGs warned the international community to avoid carrying them over into the SDGs but apparently with no success (Bond, 2006; Fukuda-Parr, 2010; Meadows, Meadows, Randors and Behrens, 2013).

While many wish to remain hopeful that the SDGs will still awaken consciousness towards “sustainable development” by giving countries the “flexibility” to choose their own course, it is indeed the failure of such flexibility that led critics to call for a strategic, systematic approach. It is the “flexibility” of the MDGs that has allowed agendas of overuse of resources, cultural extinction, and inequalities to grow. The failure of the SDGs to challenge this means that donors are likely to continue to use development funds as they are recognized to be used today, as a form of “soft power” through financial incentives (transfers of money and benefits to specific countries and their leaders) (Nye, 2004) to promote economic and political interests of the donors rather than long-term goals of sustainability and poverty reduction for beneficiaries.

Given that the international community already had a set of goals, directly in its basis of international treaties (with seven of the basic ones in the reference list, immediately following the citation of the United Nations Charter). These included approaches to sustainability, to equality and to long-term, integrated development, the question as to why there was a need for the creation of a new set of international development goals in a long political process can cynically be answered that it may have been specifically to replace what already existed in the international system and to distract attention from it. International laws had long established the goals of the international community for development (Lempert, 2014a) and it is not difficult to provide measures for the 13 internationally recognized areas of development (such as using the professionally recognized “Gini coefficient” for wealth or income distribution and equality) and establishing them as “universal development goal” targets (Lempert, 2014b).

If the process of formulating the SDGs was truly based on community participation and inclusiveness with global non-

governmental organizations (NGOs), including those of the environmental community, how is it that the ideology, as in the MDGs, is essentially that of bankers and economists claiming that growth can somehow ultimately reverse the harms that it has caused? Why have so many participants accepted the religious belief that a single urban technological monoculture will be able to find a way for technologies to infinitely expand productivity, urbanization, and human population? How is it that the only vision is of “growth” with no mention of the messages of several environmental economists who recognize community options for “de-growth” or “no growth” and other alternative consumption patterns?<sup>3</sup>

What we have in the SDGs appears to this author to be both an ideological tract and a fundraising document, to promote the private sector, possibly written by the international development banks in the interests of multi-national corporations, and financial elites in donor and recipient countries, by and for those implementing their agenda and reliant on their funding. The UN document on the SDGs seems to acknowledge this directly.

We recognize that [the SDGs] will include the mobilization of financial resources as well as capacity-building and the transfer of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries.... Public finance, both domestic and international, will play a vital role in providing essential services and public goods and in catalyzing other sources of finance. We acknowledge the role of the diverse private sector, ranging from micro-enterprises to cooperatives to multinationals, and that of civil society organizations and philanthropic organizations in the implementation of the new Agenda. (UN, 2015, p. 11)

The ideological assumptions that appear to be unchallenged and unsubstantiated, and that are at the basis of this approach seem to be that sustainability can be promoted by U.N. spending and creating a wish list rather than through any mechanisms of accountability and that sustainability can be promoted through urbanization, homogenization and some panacea of technological

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<sup>3</sup> In the view of this author, the answer appears to be that:

- The process was really driven by urban office workers who do not actually live with, understand, or value nature, or the relationship between humans and nature;
- Participating NGOs were co-opted by the agenda of globalization. A recent article examining international NGOs, their funding sources and their missions, suggests that many have simply abandoned their missions and have been transformed into for-profit businesses simply implementing the agenda of the global banks and major powers (Lempert, 2017a);
- The UN appears to have manipulated the agenda and used its resources to influence the outside discussions as well. This was clearly evident in the 2012 conference on the environment, “Rio Plus 20” (Lempert and Nguyen, 2013).

quick fixes. There is a magical belief that industrial systems are sustainable or can be made sustainable through technological innovations, without major social reorganization that many scholars openly refute (Nguyen, 2008; Daly, 2011; Dietz and O'Neill, 2013; Roszak, 1978; Yablonsky, 1972) but that goes unchallenged in the SDGs. The mantra also seems to be that trade and "growth" can promote sustainability and reduce poverty even though this view has long been contested by economists and is, in fact, in violation of basic international treaties for protecting cultural autonomy including the sanctity of their resources and economic and political systems (Gallagher and Robinson, 1953; Baran and Sweezy, 1968; Lemkin, 1944; Lindblom, 1977; Perry, 1996; Sponsel, 2000). These beliefs also conflict with the view of many experts, including some existing U.N. studies, demonstrating that trade and short-term growth do the opposite of what the SDGs claim; they uproot peoples from their resources, their lands, their traditional education and skills and cultures (Krauss, 1992; Cultural Survival, 1993; UNESCO, 2003; Lempert, 2015a; 2010).

The SDGs appear to have been misnamed. They not only fail to target the problem of unsustainability but seem likely to make it worse. In apparently resurrecting the European colonial "civilizing mission" through the SDGs, the international community appears to be putting the planet on the path to the same instabilities and fights over resources that led to the horror of World War II. It is as if all of these lessons have been forgotten. In short, what has happened is that the SDGs are being used to override established international laws and professional standards of sustainable development and to replace them with the mythical and dangerous dogma of sustainable globalization-homogenization-industrialization-urbanization.

As a lawyer, sworn to uphold the rule of law, as a social scientist sworn to protect professional ethics, and as a development profession and humanitarian concerned for the future of the planet and the survival of its cultures, this author can only express shock mixed with some outrage at what seems to have happened in the SDGs.

Since the actual goals of the SDGs seem to be to further globalization and consumption in a way that urbanizes and assimilates peoples and cultures, this author suggests that they be referred to as the Global Assimilation Goals, with the appropriate acronym (GAGs).

While the international community in adopting the SDGs appears to have historically regressed to the period of European colonialism, it would be well advised to go back farther in European and world history and to reread the story of the Biblical Noah, in Genesis, the impacts of extreme climate changes and then the story of the world that followed.



In the Bible, the great historical flood (possibly around 1500 B.C.E.) is described as an attempt by “God” to eliminate the corruption and greed of humanity and to restart humanity only with those who have the foresight to plan ahead and to protect nature by placing nature as its first priority and accepting the necessary sacrifices.

In rebuilding the world, however, the story tells of an ancient empire that had become a mono-culture. Its focus was on glorification and consumption and the building of a huge tower, in “Babel”. This early globalization and mono-culture was unsustainable and on a path to collapse. It disappeared, only to be replaced by a world of diverse languages and cultures either investing appropriately for continued productivity for urban, technological societies or fitting within their eco-systems for rural cultures, but with the problem of needing to find a way to protect these differences and work together, rather than concentrating, again and again, in a single system that assured they would fall.

Stability, sustainability, poverty reduction and human progress occur through promoting and protecting diversity and standards. These were enshrined in international laws after World War II to prevent a recurrence. Now, 70 years later, that infrastructure is forgotten and eliminated in agreements like the SDGs. In the views of this author, it will have dire consequences for the planet and humanity.

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## Annex

### *The Content of the SDGs:*

#### *Continuity and Discontinuity from the MDGs to the SDGs*

Since the SDGs are a long list of 17 goals that are not explicitly linked to the MDGs that preceded them, the best way to view the continuities and discontinuities is to put the two lists side by side to see how they match up, starting with the MDGs and its numbering. Table A1 offers this easy way to see the SDGs in a summary and to also understand how they relate to the MDGs that preceded them. The table also makes clear that both in the goals and in their numerical ordering, the SDGs is really a continuation of the MDGs rather than a resetting of priorities or approaches. This is in fact how the SDGs are described, as seeking “to complete what these [MDGs] did not achieve, particularly in reaching the most vulnerable” but without any explanation of why the MDGs failed and why the new goals can be expected to do better (UN, 2015, p. 6).

In the table, the MDGs are presented along the left hand column and the SDGs that address similar issues are placed in the right hand column. For all of the 8 MDGs, there are successor SDGs, though three of the MDGs in the area of health are essentially now combined into one SDG on universal health. The one MDG on the environment is now expanded into 6 SDGs, but some of them just take previous MDG sub-goals and turn them into individual MDGs. The new SDGs that correlate with the previous MDGs can be seen as creating moving targets so that the call for funding in those areas (and for certain implementers) will not run out. For example, the call for universal primary education that was an MDG is still part of the SDGs but there is now a call for continuous education and vocational education. Note also that for all of these goals, there is no benchmark and no explanation of the problem that the goals seek to solve. There is no explanation, for example, why there is a need for expanding global trade.

There are some 6 SDGs out of the total 17 that can be described as new and not a continuation from the MDGs. Interestingly, 5 of them are not in the area of sustainability, rights protections or in recognized areas of human development (!). On the table, these 5 are presented under the category, “Increased Resource Exploitation and Consumption to Reduce Poverty” in an attempt to fit into the overall logic of the SDGs as described in the section above. The goal of increasing Gross Domestic Products and supplying peoples with “modern energy”, housing and transportation can all be described as promoting increased consumption on a single, homogenizing, urban industrial model of standardized consumption and production that are part of the SDG agenda (SDG 10 and SDG 17). The other new SDG, 16, is a grab bag of goals that uses rhetoric on rights and security. However, the sub-indicators for this SDG actually promote a narrow and questionable view of this agenda that do not seem to match the goal of the title. The applications of rights have

no targets and are limited to some very specific circumstances. In this author's view, they appear to be very vague and weak restatements of what already exists under several international rights treaties without enforcement.

Overall, the continuity from the MDGs is both interesting and also perplexing. The one MDG sub-goals that countries never reached and rarely even targeted was MDG 7 and its sub-goals of environmental sustainability (Pinter, Almassy, Offerdahl, and Szunyi, 2015). In application, MDG 7 was largely transformed into what is now SDG 6, for expanding access to sanitation and fresh water. The goals of promoting bio-diversity, combating climate change, and promoting sustainable development that were in MDG 7 were largely abandoned during the period of the MDGs in order to increase short-term consumption for the poor at the expense of resources, the environment, and cultures. While most countries were able to show that their poor increased consumption, as a result of selling their resources, increasing foreign aid, and allowing foreign businesses to exploit their labor as populations rose and people were desperate for short-term income, there was little attention to sustainability. Environmentalists were critical of the MDGs because this one, single MDG devoted to the environment, MDG 7, was largely undermined by competition with the rest of the MDGs. The International Institute for Sustainable Development called it "a symbolic rather than systematic treatment of the environment" (Pinter, Almassy, Offerdahl, and Szunyi, 2015).

What is perplexing is that the SDGs that can be considered additions to the MDG agenda do not appear to address the key criticisms of the MDGs that appear in the development literature. Although there was little initial criticism when the MDGs were launched, practitioners and development scholars increasingly noted and began to write on failures in the MDGs, noting the attempt to seek "quick fix" solutions based on quick technology transfers and targeting of symptoms with money or short-term unsustainable growth rather than any long-term, sustainable and structural solutions (Fehling, Nelson, Venkhatapuram, 2013; Bond, 2006; Van Norren, 2012). Some likened the strategy to the picking of "low hanging fruit" (Maxwell, 2003). In terms of "sustainability", the MDG agenda failed because it focused on increasing consumption, eliminating cultures and their sustainability in their environments, sought no controls on population to assure balance with environments, and did little to ameliorate global insecurities that were at the basis of smaller and poor countries selling their assets and increasing consumption (and defense spending) in order to protect themselves from the pressures on their resources and political and cultural systems by major powers (Lempert and Nguyen, 2011; Lempert, 2015a). These concerns are not addressed in any of the new SDGs.

**Table A1:** The Evolution of the SDGs from the MDGs

<i>Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)</i>	<i>Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)</i>
1. End Poverty and Hunger, including increasing the share of the lowest 25%	1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere (guaranteed minimum incomes) 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and <i>promote sustainable agriculture</i>
2. Offer Universal Education (at the primary school level)	4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
3. Gender Equality	5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
4. Child Health (reduce infant mortality)	3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
5. Maternal Health	
6. Combat HIV/AIDS	
7. Environmental Sustainability: species protection, lowering of ozone and CO <sub>2</sub> levels.	13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
	6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
	14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
	15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
	12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns, “taking into account the development and capabilities of developing countries”
	17. Strengthen the means of implementation through technology transfer and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development, treating all the goals and indicators as of equal weight.
8. Global Partnership: rule based trade and finance, sustainable debts	[Some sub-components of 17 on debts, global trade and finance and promoting globalization of the world economy.]
<b><i>New Goals</i></b>	
<i>Increased Resource Exploitation and Consumption to “Reduce Poverty”</i>	7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
	8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth (of at least 7%/year in Lesser Developed Countries), full and productive employment and decent work for all
	9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
	10. Reduce inequality within and among countries (through increased income and consumption of the poor)
	11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable with more housing, transportation
<i>Security, Policing, Law, and Democracy (?)</i>	16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all (domestic) levels

*Interpretive Content Analysis of the Comparative Emphases of the SDGs and MDGs:*

A slightly longer way to analyze the SDGs is to take some of the different functional area categories for development and to look at the emphasis placed on them in the SDGs as well as to note categories where the SDGs do nothing at all. This approach simply takes the SDGs on their face, without analyzing whether they are likely (or even designed) to have any impact or not, and puts the words into categories to see what is emphasized and what isn't. This is the same kind of semantic analysis that one would apply to an advertisement, which may be all that the SDGs are.

While Table A1 just presents a list of the SDGs and MDGs, the goal of this section is to try to analyze both the SDGs and MDGs in terms of relative emphasis. Since there are 8 MDGs, each MDG represents 12.5% of the MDG agenda, and since there are 17 SDGs, each SDG represents about 5.9% of the SDG agenda. By identifying categories and then adding up the number of MDGs and SDGs, it is possible to see the percentage emphasis in each category.

Table A2 presents both the MDGs and SDGs by category areas of interventions using established development categories and the percentages of MDGs and SDGs found in each category. The assigning of SDGs to a specific category is not always clear cut since some of the SDGs have multiple objectives that fit more than one category and some of the sub-goals could also fit in multiple categories. The assignments are not perfect but are attempts to try to code the SDGs for analysis.

There is a lot going on in this one table and the table could potentially be several different tables using different frameworks for examining development and/or international interventions. Rather than offer several different tables, I have started with the MDGs and SDGs themselves to see if they fit into any standard categories in the development literature that could constitute lines in the table.

Since most of the MDGs and SDGs are actually framed in terms of sectors of activity (and human consumption) like education, and health, I created aggregates for these Sector categories (in regular print) and for areas of environment and "sustainability" as another sector cluster. The water sector overlaps categories since the concern for clean drinking water and sanitation relates to human health and consumption directly, as opposed to water as a part of the environment and eco-systems, so I have created percentages that do not include water and then those that do (using an asterix (\*)). The development community largely refers to these as basic "economic rights", so I have used that title for this category to distinguish it from other areas that are more clearly found as rights in international treaties. Since so many of the MDGs were in the health sector, I also created a sub-category for this specific sector that I put in brackets ([]) and italicize. I also listed individually some of the categories of development that are found in the international human rights treaties and in the basic UN documents including political rights (from the ICCPR, 1966), social rights (ICESCR, 1966), cultural rights (UNDRIP, 2007; UN Genocide Convention, 1948), and the basic goals of the U.N. for demilitarization and peace (UN Charter, 1948; IDHR, 1948), as well as the goals for individual development contained in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989). For the area of Environment and Sustainability, that can be considered a sector, I also created a sub-category to highlight whether or not the appropriate economic measures of asset protection and wealth were being calculated in any MDG and SDG categories, given that GDP (a short-term income measure) is included in the SDGs. I also included a sector for trade promotion ("Globalization").

To contrast the amount of emphasis in the SDGs and MDGs on sustainability as well as to contrast the emphasis on categories that come out of the basis of international treaties and declarations, I created two categories to denote those goals with specific ideological components that are not found at all in international treaties but that do, specifically, appear in the SDGs and MDGs without any reference to basis in international legal agreements. These are the calls for “economic growth” and “use” or exploitation of resources, in one category, and the call for homogeneous consumption and production patterns as a form of “equalization” or assimilation into a common urban, industrial culture and standard.

In the summaries at the bottom of the table, I have used the logic of the international community in distinguishing “basic needs” for human survival (Streeten, et. al., 1981) from economic benefits that go beyond “basic needs”, and for noting other areas of human development that are found in international treaties like the CRC (1992) and the full body of human rights treaties and declarations that call for promoting rights, developing human spirituality and intellectual abilities and mental health, as well as promoting peace, tolerance, and diversity, among others. I also created a category adding in “sustainability concerns”.

The highlights of the table are presented as follows.

In both the MDGs and SDGs, the focus is on the categories of economic “rights” or consumption, including health, education, housing, and energy, accounting for more than half the totals. Depending on how the MDG 7 on sanitation and water is classified (as consumption or protection of water), more than half of both the MDGs and SDGs focus on increased consumption, though health concerns are now a smaller portion in the SDGs than they were in the MDGs.

The major change between the SDGs and MDGs is not the inclusion of additional goals on sustainability, though these rise from 1 of 8 MDGs to 5 of 17 of the SDGs, but in fact, the opposite; the emphasis on the ideological category of economic growth and resource exploitation! These were a bit more than one third of the SDGs (3 of 8) but now more than half of the SDGs (9 of 17). Indeed, if there is an agenda that is inconsistent with “sustainability” in the SDGs, it is this agenda of accelerated “growth” that precludes “de-growth” or “no growth” (steady state” alternatives (Daly, 2011; Daly and Farly, 2003; Dietz and O’Neill, 2013) that would allow communities and countries to choose alternate paths for protection and survival rather than copying the consumption patterns of urbanized, industrial (“developed”) countries.

A similar way of categorizing the ideology of the MDGs and SDGs and analyzing the changing emphasis is to ask how many of them promote the idea of moving towards a single standard of consumption in which the “under-developed countries” copy the lifestyles of urban, industrial societies rather than accept different choices and balances. The ideological category of “urbanization and assimilation” has also risen from about one third of the MDGs to more than half of the SDGs (!). By establishing international targets or goals that replicate the consumption patterns of “developed” urban societies, what these goals actually appear to be doing is to assimilate all cultures and societies into a uniform urban culture, rather than to allow a diverse set of choices consistent with cultural diversity and “sustainability”. Putting all children into state public schools, for example, is a form of standardization that calls for indigenous cultures to eliminate their traditional forms of education and socialization (with parents, grandparents and community, directly in their natural environments) with mass industrial institutionalized practices that force cultural

assimilation. It is easy to examine the goals and to come up with a count of goals that call for uniform standards following those of industrial countries rather than allow for diverse cultural choices for balancing sustainability. While only one third of the MDGs explicitly sought this goal, more than half of the SDGs now explicitly set these consumption standards (and the approaches to industrial production, institutional assimilation, and “growth” that come with them) as those for all cultures and countries to emulate!

Although there are now two SDGs that mention political rights (gender and “justice”), the percentage emphasis is actually now less than under the MDGs (1 of 8). There is no mention at all in the document about the global distribution of political power, the power and (un)accountability of international banks, of international economic actors, of major military organizations, and of international organizations like the U.N., itself even though these were among some of the sharpest criticisms of the failures of the MDGs, particularly in the area of distributional inequalities and the spectrum of political inequality (Kabeer, 2010; Denoulin and Shahani, 2009; Saith, 2006). In mention of economic inequality, the only political solution is at local levels, but there is no mention of redistributive taxation of the wealthy or of any social solidarity between rich and poor or of reducing lavish consumption of the rich; only of making it more efficient.

Another way to see what is happening is to look at those categories that do not even register in the MDGs and SDGs that one would expect, given international laws and treaties as well as the naming of the SDGs as “sustainable development” goals. For example, there is not a single mention of asset measures or per capita asset protections, which are the key to protecting the environment (by measuring it, first) and of increasing wealth and well-being (the per capita endowment of resources). This is trumped by the goal of rapid exploitation to generate income.

As with the MDGs, there is not a single mention of cultural rights, of communities, indigenous peoples or their protections, though these are at the bedrock of both international law and sustainability (harmony of peoples within their environments and cultural diversity as the key to human innovation and survival). There is a single SDG sub-goal on heritage protection (11.4) but not on culture. Nor is there a mention of any social rights to protect family, community, religion, non-state education or traditions. These disappear. The goal of the SDGs is to assure that no one is “left behind”, which appears from the lack of mention of culture and community protections, to signal an agenda of assimilation and cultural destruction. While a number of critics of the MDGs noted the failure of the MDGs to incorporate most of the key “universal” development goals, such as peace (including demilitarization and disarmament), security, and political equality (democracy and human rights) at various levels (Saith, 2006; Hill, Mansour and Claudio, 2010; Waage, Banerji, Campbell, Chirwa, Collender, Dieltiens and Unterhalter, 2010), little if any of this global consensus agenda found in international treaties found its way into the SDGs.

Though there is a focus on education, it is on State education for economic productivity, with no goals for any kind of individual education and development other than productivity. Schools can continue to be boxes or cages without gardens or libraries or sports fields or laboratories.

The goals of de-militarization (to put an end to one of the largest categories of wasteful consumption) and peace are also nowhere to be found in the SDGs or MDGs, though these are

claimed to be the mission of the SDGs, in the SDG document, and they are the bedrock goal and reason for being of the U.N.

In directly examining the portion of the SDGs that do focus on sustainability, it is also interesting to note what else is emphasized and not emphasized, though this is not shown in the table. While there are several SDG goals for “sustainable use” of resources, there are few goals focusing on pollution/toxins and the major concerns of the “brown environment”. There is little mention of toxins that threaten the human species and all species, of radiation from atomic energy use and military use, of threats to human endocrine and reproductive systems, or genetic modification and its risks. These would not only fit the logic of sustainability but are also likely within the U.N. mandate, and could be presented strategically in an integrated and systematic way within the SDGs. Their absence seems to highlight that the SDGs were actually designed to serve other interests and stakeholders.

The ideology embedded in the MDGs and SDGs can also be quickly tested by categorizing them in terms of their focus on basic needs (Streeten, et. al., 1981), on improved well-being beyond survival, on improved well-being including sustainability concerns, and on higher, non-animal needs that are part of being human and of human development (Maslow, 1943). While half of the MDGs focused on basic survival needs and only third on improved economic well-being including sustainability concerns, half of the SDGs now focus on improved well-being beyond survival and almost all of them on this with sustainability concerns added (14 of 17). Yet, there is zero recognition of any non-economic human needs in the MDGs and only one of the SDGs (on “justice”) seems to see human beings as anything other than animals and consumers. This is in direct defiance of international rights treaties that require all rights to be treated equally and integrated without prioritization that strips non-economic concerns from government agendas.

This “progression” of the MDGs to the SDGs, moving from basic needs to industrializing and urbanizing humanity in the belief that this growth will “buy” a cleaner and sustainable planet, reflects an ideology of colonialism and growth that dates to the 1950s (Rostow, 1960). It was long-ago discarded as unsubstantiated in some of the early environmental literature (Carson, 1962; Meadows, Meadows, Randers and Behrens, 1972; Schumacher, 1973; Brown, 1981; Hardin, 1993) and many environmentalists today refer to these earlier beliefs as “growth fetishism” (Hamilton, 2010). Yet, for some reason, this view seems to have returned in the SDGs.

Overall, the continuities and contradictions between the naming of the SDGs and its contents, suggest that the renaming of the MDGs as SDGs may be little more than a marketing strategy and that the goals themselves may simply be a fundraising document for an agenda of a small group of stakeholders rather than any kind of action plan for the benefits of humanity.



**Table A2.** Changes in Emphasis from MDGs to SDGs:

<i>Category of Goals</i>	<i>Percentage of 8 MDGs</i>	<i>Percentage of 17 SDGs</i>
<b><i>Sector Analysis</i></b>		
Economic Rights/Consumption Policy (Education, Health, Water*, Energy, Housing, etc.)	62.5 (75.0*)	52.9 (58.8*)
[ <i>Health Protections</i> ]	37.5	5.9]
Political Rights (Gender and other Individual)	12.5	11.8
Social Rights (Family, Community, Religion, Non-state Education, etc.)	0	0
Cultural Rights and Protection	0	0
De-militarization and Peace	0	0
Individual Development/Education other than Economic Productivity	0	0
Environment and “Sustainability” (not counting Water)	12.5	29.4
[ <i>Natural and Other Asset/Wealth Measures and Per Capita Asset/Wealth Protection</i> ]	0	0]
Globalization (Trade Promotion and Linkages)	12.5	5.9
<b><i>Ideological Groupings</i></b>		
<i>Economic Growth and Resource Exploitation (Not including “Sustainable use” goals)</i>	37.5	58.8
<i>Urbanization and Assimilation (State education, gender equality, common technology and consumption, trade)</i>	37.5	52.9
<b><i>Summary:</i></b>		
<i>Basic Physical Survival Needs</i>	50.0	11.8
<i>Improved Economic Well Being beyond Survival</i>	25.0 (Education, Gender Eq.)	52.9
<i>Improved Economic Well Being Including Sustainability Concerns</i>	37.5	82.3
<i>Non-Animal, Higher/Human Development</i>	0	5.9