

# Global governance campaigning and MDGs: From top-down to bottom-up anti-poverty work

By Patrick Bond

## ABSTRACT

The Millennium Development Goals were generated nontransparently by the United Nations, itself simultaneously moving to embrace the Washington Consensus with its pro-corporate Global Compact, endorsement of 'Type 2' Public-Private Partnership privatisation strategies, and growing collaboration with the World Bank. Aspirational targets like the MDGs are far less important than the actual social struggles underway across the world for basic needs and democracy. Campaigning for MDGs distracts us from solidarity with the real agents of progressive social and environmental history.

## Introduction

The role of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the movements for global justice is contentious. The time is ripe for switching to an approach that seeks solutions emerging from below, where the agency of progressive history is invariably found. The problem that advocates of the MDGs have raised for serious anti-poverty activists, is the legitimisation (and material strengthening) of the adverse power relations, unreformed global-scale institutions and capital accumulation patterns that work against the poor and the environment.

No one would object to the broad MDG goals, of course:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Control HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

United Nations General Assembly resolution 55/2 set seven targets:

- To reduce the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by half between 1990 and 2015;
- enrol all children of school age in primary schools by 2015;

- make progress toward gender equality and empowering women by eliminating gender disparities in enrolment in primary and secondary education by 2005;
- reduce infant and child mortality ratios by two-thirds between 1990 and 2015;
- reduce maternal mortality ratios by three-quarters between 1990 and 2015;
- provide access for all who need reproductive health services by 2015; and
- implement national strategies for sustainable development by 2005, to reverse the loss of environmental resources by 2015.

Yet the MDG process and the concrete strategies for achieving these objectives – including privatisation of basic services such as water and electricity – may do more harm than good. My own critique of the MDGs adds little to what has been already argued, not only by traditional critics in civil society and academia, but even by the United Nations itself. To be sure, there may be some benefits associated with the globally-constituted, universal objectives. As Peggy Antrobus of DAWN puts it, ‘Viewed within the context of “the new aid agenda”, the MDGs provide a common framework agreed to by all governments with measurable targets and indicators of progress, around which governments, UN agencies, International Financial Institutions and civil society alike could rally.’<sup>1</sup> They permit at least notional accountability for donor agencies and states, which civil society activists are already pointing to – adorned with white wrist and headbands – as a guilt trip reminder.

However, speaking the language of many feminists and social justice activists, Antrobus is blunt: ‘I do not believe in the MDGs. I think of them as a Major Distraction Gimmick’:

There is evidently widespread awareness of their limitation: their inadequate targets and indicators; their restriction to indicators that are quantifiable, when much of what is most important – such as Women’s Equality and Empowerment – is not easily quantifiable; their omission of important Goals and Targets, such as Violence against Women and Sexual and Reproductive Rights<sup>2</sup>; their silence on the context and institutional environment in which they are to be met... In fact, a major problem of the

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1. Peggy Antrobus, ‘Presentation to Working Group on the MDGs and Gender Equality’, UNDP Caribbean Regional Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Conference, Barbados, 7 July 2003.

2. Antrobus argues: ‘The deliberate exclusion of this fundamental indicator of women’s human rights and empowerment from the MDGs symbolises both the lack of sincerity on the part of the majority of those who voted on them, and the struggle that lies ahead for anyone who seriously seeks equality, equity and empowerment for women.’

MDGs is their abstraction from the social, political and economic context in which they are to be implemented – the ‘political economy’ of the MDGs... To the extent that all the goals relate to the role of the state, one must ask how feasible it is that states weakened by the requirements of policy frameworks of neo-liberalism and whose revenues are reduced by privatisation and trade liberalism can be expected to achieve the goals and targets of the MDGs?

Central to MDG political economy is that the Bretton Woods Institutions and World Trade Organisation – acting mainly for G8 governments and corporations – appear intent upon bringing ever more aspects of life under the rules of commodification, attributing market values to society and nature. Hence, as the UN itself admits, ‘International Monetary Fund programme design has paid almost no systematic attention to the goals when considering a country’s budget or macroeconomic framework.’ A 2005 UN report complains that ‘In the vast number of country programmes supported by the IMF since the adoption of the goals, there has been almost no discussion about whether the plans are consistent with achieving them.’ The report documents how budget constraints prevent scaling up sectoral strategies for some of the MDGs, and that in some cases, ‘countries are advised not to even to consider such scaled-up plans’ by the Bretton Woods Institutions.<sup>3</sup>

UN Habitat’s website also admits ‘the common criticism of MDG as a “top-down” process, which excludes Local Authority and other stakeholders’ involvement... There is, thus, an inherent danger that even if the targets are achieved, the inequalities within a nation across people and places would still persist.’<sup>4</sup> Minority Rights Group International agrees: ‘There is a genuine risk that the strategies used to achieve the MDGs will be less beneficial for minority groups, might increase inequalities and may harm some minority communities.’<sup>5</sup> That risk was acknowledged in the UNDP’s *Human Development Report 2003: Millennium Development Goals*, which conceded that ‘Women, rural inhabitants, ethnic minorities and other poor people are typically progressing slower than national averages - or showing no progress - even where countries as a whole are moving towards the Goals.’<sup>6</sup>

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3. Wachira Waruru, ‘IMF, World Bank Come Under Heavy Criticism’, *The East African Standard* (Nairobi), 18 January 2005.

4. UN Habitat, ‘Urban Management Programme’, Website <http://hq.unhabitat.org/cdrom/ump/CD/about.html> accessed 7 July 2005.

5. UNDP, *Human Development Report 2003. Millennium Development Goals: A compact among nations to end human poverty*, New York, UNDP, 2003, p.3.

6. Minority Rights Group International, ‘The Millennium Development Goals: Helping or Harming Minorities?’ Presentation to UN Commission on Human Rights Sub-Commission on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, Working Group on Minorities, New York, 30 May 2005.

The MDGs themselves are sometimes ridiculed for their lack of ambition. Kumi Naidoo of Civicus – who is responsible for energetic advocacy of MDGs within the ‘Global Call to Action Against Poverty’ (GCAP) – admits that ‘Those that use the MDG framework do so on a strategic level and are pushing for goals beyond the MDGs, i.e. Vietnam speaks of MDG Plus, and other speak of “beyond MDGs”’.<sup>7</sup> Civicus staff sometimes refer to the ‘Minimalist Development Goals’, even though MDGs are the central focus of the GCAP.

But notwithstanding these concessions, the GCAP, Make Poverty History and Live8 campaigning so evident at the Gleneagles G8 protests in July 2005 all suffer from the direction of their gaze – to the powerful – and from their simultaneous diminution of the organic anti-poverty, pro-justice struggles that will genuinely make history. The gaze to the powerful takes for granted that the G8, the WTO, Bretton Woods Institutions and Third World state elites are the solution, not the main part of the problem.

Hence some UN bureaucrats argue that the MDG commitments to a ‘global partnership’ on aid, trade and debt ‘find their current official commitments in the Monterrey Consensus on development finance, the Doha “development” round on trade, and the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative, respectively. Progress on global commitments for improved aid, fairer trade and steep debt relief will determine, to a large extent, the successful achievement of the first seven MDGs by 2015 in most if not all developing countries.’<sup>8</sup>

If so, that official commitment worsens poverty rather than reduces it. The UN bureaucrats do admit that while ‘Monterrey, Doha and HIPC hold great promise to make significant contributions to the achievement of the MDGs, however, progress thus far has been extremely slow.’ Is it, though, the case that ‘significant contributions’ can be made by three processes that are so explicitly neoliberal?

### **Monterrey, Doha, HIPC**

What happened in Monterrey, Mexico, in March 2002? The United Nations Financing for Development (FFD) Conference was the first major international opportunity to correct global capital markets since the spectacular late 1990s emerging markets crises, ranging from Mexico (1995) through Latin America (1995), to Eastern Europe and South Africa (1996), to Thailand, Indonesia and

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7. Kumi Naidoo, ‘Civil Society Gears up for a Major Global Campaign against Poverty’, CIVICUS Secretary General and Chief Executive Officer, Johannesburg, 21 January 2005.

8. Jan Vandemoortele, Kamal Malhotra and Joseph Anthony Lim, ‘Is MDG 8 on Track as a Global Deal for Human Development?’, United Nations Development Programme Bureau for Development Policy, Socio-economic Development Group, New York, June 2003.

Malaysia (1997), then South Korea, Russia and South Africa again (1998), to Brazil (1999), and on to Turkey and Argentina (2000), and back to Argentina and South Africa (2001). South African finance minister Trevor Manuel and former International Monetary Fund managing director Michael Camdessus were UN secretary general Kofi Annan's special envoys. Aid shortfalls and external debt were considered the main constraints, whereas global financial volatility, while recognised as a problem, was not explicitly linked to development goals. Achieving the MDG targets would cost \$54 billion per year, according to IMF and World Bank estimates.<sup>9</sup>

Civil society critics argued that the FFD conference was tainted from the outset, given that Mexico's ex-president Ernesto Zedillo effectively managed the process. The Yale-trained neoliberal economist's five-year term in Mexico City was notable for repression, failed economic crisis-management, and the end of his notoriously corrupt party's 85-year rule. Controversially, Zedillo appointed as his main advisor (and document author) John Williamson of the Washington-based Institute for International Finance, a think-tank primarily funded by the world's largest commercial banks. Williamson is considered one of the establishment's most vigorous neoliberal ideologues, and takes credit for coining the term 'Washington Consensus' in 1990.

Hence the FFD's central premises were straightforward: deeper integration of developing countries into the global financial system; and combining World Bank, IMF, WTO and donor government powers, so as to more effectively arm-twist Third World countries. During the course of the proceedings, Manuel endorsed privatisation: 'Public-private partnerships are important win-win tools for governments and the private sector, as they provide an innovative way of delivering public services in a cost-effective manner.'<sup>10</sup> (Back in South Africa, PPPs were nearly universally failing, from the standpoint of workers and consumers, and sometimes also businesses, in water, sanitation, electricity, telecommunications, the postal system, forestry, air and road transport, ports and road construction.<sup>11</sup>) In August 2001 and October 2002, the main trade unions held two-day mass stayaways against private partnerships involving essential public services. Manuel didn't mention these problems, even as caveats, nor did he

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9. United Nations, 'Report of the International Conference on Financing for Development,' A/CONF.198/11, Monterrey, Mexico, Statement by Mike Moore, Director-General, World Trade Organisation, 22 March, 2002. The IMF and Bank tend to underestimate the recurrent costs associated with most basic-needs goods, because the institutions generally insist on cost-recovery and self-financing.

10. Trevor Manuel, 'Remarks to the International Business Forum at the International Conference on Financing for Development,' Monterrey, 18 March 2002.

11. See Patrick Bond (Editor), *Fanon's Warning: A Civil Society Reader on the New Partnership for Africa's Development*, Africa World Press, UKZN Centre for Civil Society and AIDC, 2005, for a discussion of the primary pilots and their failings.

concede his government's repeated failure to reach revenue targets from state asset sales.

In the same spirit, the underlying objective of those who authored the Monterrey Consensus was to grant more power to the Bank, Fund and WTO. In contrast, the WHO, International Labour Organisation, UN Conference on Trade and Development and UN Research Institute for Social Development were too centrist to be integrated into Monterrey's neoliberal framework. When Monterrey requested states to 'encourage policy and programme coordination of international institutions and coherence at the operational and international levels,' some institutions were more coherent than others. Coordination would come between the Bretton Woods Institutions and WTO first, and was a dangerous new mode of introducing cross-conditionality.

As critics in the main progressive agriculture think-tanks explained in May 2003, 'Over the decades, loan conditions of the IMF/World Bank have forced developing countries to lower their trade barriers, cut subsidies for their domestic food producers, and eliminate government programmes aimed to enhance rural agriculture. However, no such conditions are imposed on wealthy industrial countries.' Instead, the WTO explicitly permits the dumping of 'surplus foods at prices below the cost of production, driving out rural production in developing countries and expanding markets for the large transnational exporting companies. It also prohibits developing countries from introducing new programmes that may help their local agriculture producers. As a result the agriculture sectors in developing countries, key for rural poverty reduction, have been devastated.' Similar NGO complaints were made about the 'coherence agenda' on water privatisation, regulation of foreign investors, and governance of the multilateral institutions.<sup>12</sup>

Supporters of the MDGs and Monterrey would no doubt reply that the problems in agricultural markets - especially dumping and northern subsidies - could be resolved, but only if momentum increased to *reform* the institutions to more democratically reflect the needs of southern countries instead of northern voting power. Yet the Monterrey Consensus offered only timid suggestions for global governance reforms. The Bank and IMF took nearly a full year to come forward with a plan, which, as it turned out, was an insult to the concept of democratic global governance. The Monterrey final report merely recognised 'the need to broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in international economic decision-making and norm-setting... We encourage the following actions

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12. Center of Concern, International Gender and Trade Network and Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, 'IMF-World Bank-WTO Close Ranks Around Flawed Economic Policies,' Washington, Geneva and Minneapolis, <http://www.coc.org/resources/articles/display.html?ID=484>, 2003.

[from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank]: to continue to enhance participation of all developing countries and countries with economies in transition in their decision-making.<sup>13</sup>

The democracy deficit actually worsened in the wake of Monterrey, as witnessed by the controversial appointments of Spanish and US conservatives Rodrigo Rato and Paul Wolfowitz in 2004-05. At the Bretton Woods Institutions, nearly fifty Sub-Saharan African countries are represented by just two directors, while eight rich countries enjoy a director each and the US maintains veto power by holding more than 15% of the votes. (There is no transparency as to which board members take what positions on key votes.) The leaders of the Bank and IMF are chosen from, respectively, the US and EU, with the US treasury secretary holding the power of hiring or firing.

The *Financial Times* reported that in the wake of Monterrey's weak commitment, the 2003 Bank/Fund strategy emanating from Trevor Manuel's Bank/IMF Development Committee offered only 'narrow technocratic changes,' such as adding *one* additional representative from the south to the 24-member board.<sup>14</sup> Details emerged in mid-2003 when a leaked World Bank paper proposed raising developing country voting power from 39% to 44% and adding one new African executive director. But IMF governance, Bank/IMF board transparency or Bank/IMF senior management selection were all neglected in the June 2003 proposals.<sup>15</sup> For the US, even those milquetoast reforms were too much, and the Bush regime's executive director to the Bank, Carol Brooking, opposed reforms and instead suggested merely a new fund for extra research capacity aimed at the two institutions' Third World directors.<sup>16</sup> After several years of high-profile lobbying for governance reform and insider attempts at change from positions of real influence, Manuel has come to accept the democracy deficit with grace. As he put it at a press conference during the September 2003 IMF/Bank annual meeting in Dubai, when asked why no progress was made on Bretton Woods governance reform, 'I don't think that you can ripen this tomato by squeezing it.'<sup>17</sup>

Reforms of the Bank and IMF have generally failed. Nothing said at Monterrey prevented the Bank, for example, from reinvigorating its push towards state

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13. United Nations, 'Report of the International Conference on Financing for Development,' Final Resolution, pa62-63.

14. *Financial Times*, 13 February 2003.

15. World Bank, 'Issues Note: Enhancing the Voice of Developing and Transition Countries at the World Bank,' Washington, 9 June 2003, <http://www.brettonwoodsproject.org/topic/governance/WBgovissuesnote.pdf>

16. <http://www.brettonwoodsproject.org>

17. World Bank, 'Proceedings of Press Conference,' Dubai, <http://www.worldbank.org>, 22 September 2003.

services privatisation in the 2004 *World Development Report*. According to London School of Economics professor Robert Wade,

The US has steered the World Bank - through congressional conditions on the replenishment of the International Development Association (IDA), the soft-loan facility - to launch its biggest refocusing in a decade, a 'private sector development' agenda devoted to the same end of accelerating the private (and non-governmental organisation) provision of basic services on a commercial basis. The World Bank has made no evaluation of its earlier efforts to support private participation in social sectors. Its new private sector development thrust, especially in the social sectors, owes almost everything to intense US pressure.<sup>18</sup>

These examples reflect the frivolous nature of the Monterrey mandate for reform of the Bretton Woods Institutions. As Jubilee South Africa's Neville Gabriel commented, 'Monterrey bowed to the *status quo* in international power relations by glossing over the need for more representative global governance mechanisms.' Yet, reported Gabriel, 'Halfway through the conference, German government representatives and IMF and World Bank officials declared a new era in global development thinking, marked by a shift from the Washington Consensus to a new Monterrey Consensus.' The underlying power bloc - which Gabriel accurately described as 'a dictatorship of nameless, faceless, and unaccountable technocrats, obsessed with private market-driven growth that sees the masses of impoverished people as incidental to the wealth creation project' - was undisturbed.<sup>19</sup> Concluded Canadian financial-democracy activist Robin Round (of the Halifax Initiative):

After five long years of preparatory work, the UN Financing for Development conference is a diplomatic disaster. This conference was to find new ways to wipe out poverty and narrow the growing gap between rich and poor. Intense US pressure, however, gutted the process, reducing the final conference statement to a set of vague principles and generalities... Governments eliminated or weakened commitments that could have delivered real reform to global finance and trade systems that by their very nature keep the poor poor.<sup>20</sup>

Doha was, likewise, so imbalanced that the so-called 'Development Agenda' (a euphemism for a new round of trade) again made matters worse not better.<sup>21</sup> In

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18. Robert Wade, 'The Invisible Hand of the American Empire,' *Open Democracy*, 13, 3, 2003.

19. Neville Gabriel, 'Monterrey: Spinning the Washington Consensus All the Way to Johannesburg,' Pretoria, Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, 2002, p.2.

20. Robin Round, 'CBC Commentary,' Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 20 March 2002.

21. For a critique, see Robert Wade, 'The Ringmaster of Doha,' *New Left Review*, 25, January-February 2004.



short, the agenda of deepening liberalisation was successful at the WTO's November 2001 ministerial summit, in the wake of the Seattle 1999 breakdown and the 9/11 terrorist attack on the US, which played into US hands. Amidst exceptionally tight security, dissenting delegates were threatened that trade preferences to their countries would be withdrawn if they didn't sign on. At one point, a live microphone picked up then-WTO leader Michael Moore's discussion with the Qatari host trade minister about how to stop the Indian delegation from even taking the floor to speak. Save the Children trade analyst John Hilary concluded, 'Bullying and blackmail have become an integral part of how the WTO works, as we saw all too clearly at the Doha ministerial. Time and again, developing countries have been forced to abandon negotiating positions as a result of economic, political and even personal threats to their delegates.'<sup>22</sup>

The African delegation was a key site of struggle. Aileen Kwa of Focus on the Global South reported, 'What broke Africa in the final two days, was when the US and the EU contacted heads of state such as President Obasanjo of Nigeria and other African leaders. This led to delegations in Doha receiving calls from their capitals. While Nigeria had earlier been quite firm in its opposition, it suddenly went silent in the final 13th November meetings.'<sup>23</sup> The possibility of a coerced deal became tangible when South African trade minister Alec Erwin met the African, Africa-Caribbean-Pacific and Lesser-Development-Country groups on the final day of the Doha negotiations. Dot Keet reports that Erwin

advised them that they had no choice but to accept the text, which was 'the best possible outcome for them in the circumstances.' According to participants and eyewitnesses, there were a number of angry responses to the South African minister, some even asking rhetorically who he represented and whose interests he was serving... The joint meeting dissolved in disarray. This was the final maneuver that dissipated the resistance of a major grouping of developing countries that many had hoped would repeat (at) Doha their role in Seattle. This was not to be. All the pressures and persuasions, manipulations and maneuvers only managed to secure what one Member of the European Parliament characterised as 'a resentful acquiescence.'<sup>24</sup>

Erwin's own Doha agenda was exposed in the *Mail & Guardian*, which reported that although 'Africa got a sop in the form of a promise to the developing world to help build capacity,' the overall outcome was negative. The newspaper reported:

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22. Cited in Mark Lynas, 'Playing Dirty at the WTO,' *Third World Network Features*, Penang, Malaysia, June 2003.

23. Aileen Kwa, *Power Politics in the WTO*, Bangkok, Focus on the Global South, 2002, p.24.

24. Dot Keet, *South Africa's Official Role and Position in Promoting the World Trade Organisation*, Cape Town, Alternative Information and Development Centre, 2002, p.35.

South Africa led a Southern African Development Community breakaway from the consensus of key African countries this week at the World Trade Organisation ministerial meeting in Doha, Qatar. There are fears that the split between South Africa and many of its SADC partners on the one hand, and other African countries on the other, has compromised the continent's unified bargaining position. The original strategy of most African countries, along with much of the developing world, was to block a new WTO negotiations 'round' until issues - still unresolved after the 1986-1994 Uruguay round and perceived as essential to boost developing nations' interests in the world trade system - are addressed. But on the eve of the WTO's fourth ministerial meeting, held in Doha from November 9 to 13, the South African government embarked on a broad drive to get African countries to consider a new round of WTO trade negotiations.<sup>25</sup>

Erwin described the Doha Developmental Agenda - for all practical purposes the 'new round' so strongly opposed by African and civil society critics of the WTO - as a 'fantastic achievement'.<sup>26</sup> But it was soon clear that his reform agenda was not succeeding. Faced with a protectionist onslaught from the US shortly after Doha - huge steel, apparel and footwear tariffs and agricultural subsidies which negated claims of progress at the WTO summit - Erwin announced an alliance with Brazil, Australia, and the 18-nation Cairns group of food exporting countries. He soon confessed defeat: 'The position is not particularly favourable... I think we are heading for a very difficult time in Cancun.'<sup>27</sup> In 2002, other Doha deadlines were missed by trade negotiators concerning the 'special and differential treatment' required by the Third World, and the health sector's need for exemptions from Trade in Intellectual Property Rights pharmaceutical patent provisions. By September 2003 there was still no procedure and the Cairns Group strategy was conclusively frustrated. At the WTO's Cancun ministerial summit, in spite of efforts by Erwin and the G20 group to continue negotiating a deal, the ACP countries again led a Seattle-style walkout to end the charade.

Difficulties with the US were especially obvious throughout the post-Doha period. Before the G8 Summit at Evian, France in June 2003, Bush and Blair announced their opposition to host president Jacques Chirac's plan to halt dumping of subsidised Western food in Africa.<sup>28</sup> Bush proposed increasing his government's aid-related subsidies on agricultural exports and argued that 'European governments should join - not hinder - the great cause of ending hunger in Africa,' by adjusting agricultural subsidies and permitting trade in genetically-modified

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25. *Mail & Guardian*, 16 November 2001.

26. *Business Report*, 16 November 2001.

27. *Business Day*, 20 May 2003.

28. *The Guardian*, 3 June 2003.

foodstuffs.<sup>29</sup> The renewed WTO framework established in Geneva in mid-2004 fosters further commodification, while providing some rhetorical (not yet real) agricultural subsidy cuts.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, what progress on the debt – possibly the main budget constraint on Third World states' capacity to meet MDG goals? For the UN officials cited earlier, HIPC – the debt relief strategy initiated at the World Bank and IMF in 1996 – is the final component of the optimal MDG global governance strategy. HIPC was subsequently augmented by a June 2005 G8 finance ministers' deepening of debt relief for 18 countries.

However, HIPC's deep neoliberal conditionality – with a vast proportion of its country programmes (and associated Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers) requiring services privatisation – remains extremely controversial, and the programme is generally considered a failure. Within a year of Monterrey, even the World Bank conceded some of HIPC's mistakes: its staff 'had been too optimistic' about the ability of countries to repay under HIPC, and projections of export earnings were extremely inaccurate, leading to failure by half the HIPC countries to reach their completion points.<sup>31</sup>

Although HIPC was originally endorsed by milder-mannered NGO campaigners such as Jubilee Plus, it was a mirage from the outset. As the London lobby group reported, 'According to the original HIPC schedule, 21 countries should have fully passed through the HIPC initiative and received total debt cancellation of approximately \$34.7 billion in net present value terms. In fact, only eight countries have passed Completion Point, between them receiving debt cancellation of \$11.8 billion.'<sup>32</sup> There remained more than \$2 trillion of Third World debt that should be cancelled, including not just HIPC countries but also Nigeria, Argentina, Brazil, South Africa and other major debtors not considered highly-indebted or poor in the mainstream discourse. The more radical Jubilee South network, with strong leadership from groups in Argentina, Nicaragua, the Philippines and South Africa, rejects Jubilee Plus ideas about how much debt is 'sustainable' and 'repayable', arguing for full cancellation, Third World repudiation and G8-country reparations.

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29. *The Guardian*, 23 May 2003.

30. Khor, Martin (2004), 'Preliminary Comments on the WTO's July Decision and Process,' Penang, Third World Network, 6 August; Weisbrot, Mark (2004), 'No Boost for Development in World Trade Negotiations', Knight-Ridder Syndicate, 4 August; One World (2004), 'International Groups Denounce World Trade Pact,' <http://us.oneworld.net/article/view/91015/1/3319>, 2 August.

31. *Financial Times*, 27 February 2003.

32. Jubilee Plus, 'Real Progress Report on HIPC,' London, September 2003.

The lack of financial provision for HIPC in western capitals reflects deep resistance to debt relief and, probably, the realisation that there are merits to using debt as a means of maintaining control over Third World economies. An 'enhanced HIPC' was introduced to maintain control and give the *appearance* of concern. Thus at Evian in 2003, the G8 agreed with Mbeki's plea to relook at the programme, but no fundamental changes or substantial new funds were mooted. The subsequent relief package announced prior to the Gleneagles G8 summit in June 2005 meant very little, according to *GreenLeft Weekly*:

The huge figures most often quoted by the press, \$50-55 billion, include IMF, World Bank and African Development Bank debts owed by around 20 of the other poorest Third World countries, which may become eligible for debt cancellation in the future; possibly nine more in 12-18 months, and another 10 or so at some undetermined date. While the \$1.5 billion a year made available will certainly be of use for the 18 poverty-stricken countries, it will only boost their collective budget by about 6.5% per annum. The modest sum illustrates that the Western media's backslapping over their governments' 'generosity' is more than a little exaggerated and somewhat premature. Those 18 countries account for only 5% of the population of the Third World, and if all 38 countries become eligible in the future, it will still only affect around 11%...

Washington will need only find between \$130 million and \$175 million a year, which is almost three times less than it spends each year just to run its Baghdad embassy. The total 10-year cost for the US is around what Washington will spend to build a new embassy in the Iraqi capital. Washington alone spends \$2 billion a month to wage war in Iraq. If those figures call into question the 'historic' scale of the West's benevolence towards Africa and the Third World, compare them to the US annual defense budget, which will be more than \$441 billion in 2006 alone...

It should be also noted that debts owed to the Inter-American Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank are not included in the deal, nor are the Third World countries' huge bilateral debt burden (that is, debt owed to individual rich countries). Even if all 38 nominated countries eventually have their multilateral debts wiped, it will still represent just 18% of Africa's total external debt of \$300 billion, and a tiny part of the Third World's total debt, which is estimated at a staggering \$2.4 trillion.

But surely, it's a step forward? Not according to African anti-debt campaigners. African Jubilee South (AJS) pointed out on June 14 that to qualify for the G8 scheme, the initial 18 countries have had to pass what is known as the Highly Indebted Poor Country initiative's 'completion point'. The 1996 HIPC was the rich-country governments' last much-hyped, now largely forgotten, 'debt forgiveness' scheme. The 1999 G8 summit in

Cologne promised that it would lead to the cancellation of \$100 billion in bilateral debt. Just a quarter of that was actually delivered and the HIPC countries are now poorer than when they began the program.<sup>33</sup>

### **Campaigning for MDGs**

For GCAP, using MDGs as the universalising point of consensus, 'A single global title for the mobilisation is needed to provide focus, cohesion and to maximise impact of activity.' There is a genuine need for focus and cohesion. (Some have suggested that the World Social Forum be the logical site for the development of an ideological programme and plan of action that would fight poverty, militarism and ecological degradation simultaneously.) But if a global programme is developed in the manner conceived by GCAP's strategists, it could have the reverse effect: organisational demobilisation accompanied by lowest-common-denominator analyses and demands.

To illustrate, GCAP's first newsletter, issued on 14 June 2005, is a 3600-word report-back on campaigning across the world. Yet it contains no reference to organic anti-poverty activism in the Global South, such as - in no particular order - labour strikes, popular mobilisations for AIDS-treatment and other health services, reconnections of water/electricity, land and housing occupations, anti-GMO and pro-food security campaigns, women's organising, municipal budget campaigns, student and youth movements, community resistance to displacements caused by dam construction and the like, anti-debt and reparations movements, environmental justice struggles, immigrants' rights campaigns, political movements to take state power, etc etc. There was no mention of sites like Bolivia and Venezuela where popular initiatives have changed governments. The formidable recent upsurge of popular unrest - 1980s-90s IMF Riots, high-profile indigenous people's protests since Zapatismo in 1994, global justice activism since Seattle in 1999, the Social Forum movement since 2001, anti-war demos since 2001, autonomist protests and the Latin American left's revival - might never have happened, from the standpoint of CGAP.

In contrast to rhetoric about MDGs, serious activists are crossing borders, races, classes and political traditions in sector after sector: land (Via Campesino), healthcare (International Peoples Health Council), free schooling (Global Campaign for Education), water (the People's World Water Forum), energy/climate change (the Durban Declaration), debt (Jubilee South), democratic development finance (IFIs-Out! and World Bank Bonds Boycott), trade (Our World is Not for Sale) and so on. Of course, it is not at all easy to interlock the already

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33. *GreenLeft Weekly*, 'Africa needs Justice not Charity', 29 June 2005, <http://www.greenleft.org.au/back/2005/631/631p28.htm>.

overlapping grassroots and shopfloor justice campaigns. South Africans now campaigning for an overall programme of 'decommodification' and socio-economic rights know this, thanks to the various movements' political splits (mainly over the merits of alignment to the corruption-riddled, neoliberal ruling party of Thabo Mbeki).

Certainly one of the 'top-down' characteristics of the MDGs is its origins within the United Nations. The UN's drift away from serving the interests of poor people, into the circuit of global neoliberal power, has begun to attract formidable protest, certainly in South Africa. In September 2001 at the World Conference Against Racism, the UN's failure to address reparations for slavery/colonialism and Israeli apartheid led to a hostile demonstration outside the Durban convention centre by 20,000 activists. In August 2002, the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development's drive to privatise basic services and its utter failure to address most major ecological problems (such as global warming) were grounds for 25,000 people marching 12 km from an impoverished township to the luxury suburb of Sandton, demanding the UN delegates disband before doing yet more damage. The UN's 1991-2003 sanctions against Iraq and its endorsement of the illegal US occupation on May 22, 2003 were also a source of great concern to peace activists. Subsequent attempts to democratise the UN Security Council appear stalled, or watered down to the point of uselessness. Given the power structures, the militarism and the neoliberal processes that are continually reinforced in the UN, why not let it instead 'go the way of the League of Nations', as Tariq Ali advocates?<sup>34</sup>

That would leave two other approaches to try at this present stage, ahead of a future effort to rebuild genuine democratic global governance when the conditions are more amenable: 'decommodification' and 'deglobalisation'.<sup>35</sup> It should not require pointing out that by use of this latter word, no one intends the revival of autarchic experiences (last century's Albania, Burma or North Korea), or corrupt Third World chaos (contemporary Zimbabwe), or authoritarianism (Malaysia). The strategic formula which, amongst other movements, South African progressives have broadly adopted - internationalism combined with demands upon the national state to 'lock capital down'<sup>36</sup> - could begin by removing the boot of the Bretton Woods Institutions from Third World necks, as an example of what must be done. The World Bank Bonds Boycott (<http://www.worldbankboycott.org>) is having remarkable success in defunding the institution that is most often at the coalface of neoliberal repression across the Third World. In addition, South Africans and other activists have won dramatic victories in deglobalising the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights regime, by

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34. Ali, T. (2003), 'Business as Usual,' *The Guardian*, 24 May 2003.

35. Bello, W. (2002), *Deglobalisation: Ideas for a New World Economy*, London, Zed Books.

36. Bond, P. (2003), *Against Global Apartheid*, London, Zed Books, Part Four.

demanding and winning generic anti-retroviral medicines instead of branded, monopoly-patented drugs. Similar struggles are underway to deglobalise food, especially transnational corporate GMOs, to halt biopiracy, and to kick out the water and energy privatisers. These are typically 'nonreformist reforms' insofar as they achieve concrete goals and simultaneously link movements, enhance consciousness, develop the issues, and build democratic organisational forms and momentum.

As for the scale of the non-reformist reform struggles, the most important problem is 'subsidiarity': determining whether local community, subnational, national or regional strategies can best mitigate and reverse global economic tyranny for particular issues. The main reason to deglobalise is to gain space to fight neoliberal commodification. To illustrate, the South African decommodification agenda entails struggles to turn basic needs into genuine human rights including: free anti-retroviral medicines to fight AIDS (hence disempowering Big Pharma); 50 litres of free water per person per day (hence ridding Africa of Suez and other water privatisers); 1 kiloWatt hour of free electricity for each individual every day (hence reorienting energy resources from export-oriented mining and smelting, to basic-needs consumption); extensive land reform (hence de-emphasising cash cropping and export-oriented plantations); prohibitions on service disconnections and evictions; free education (hence halting the General Agreement on Trade in Services); and the like. A free 'Basic Income Grant' allowance of \$15/month is even advocated by churches, NGOs and trade unions. All such services should be universal (open to all, no matter income levels), and to the extent feasible, financed through higher prices that penalise luxury consumption. This potentially unifying agenda – far superior to MDGs, in part because the agenda reflects real, durable grassroots struggles across the world – could serve as a basis for widescale social change, in the manner that Gosta Esping-Andersen has discussed with respect to Scandinavian social policy.<sup>37</sup>

In conclusion, we can again turn to Antrobus, who reminds us of the fact that the movements for social justice, including feminism, have their own priorities, which the MDGs are threatening to derail:

All the MDGs are political issues, none more so than the goal of gender equality and women's empowerment, and they will never be achieved if we continue to treat them as issues that can be addressed by purely technical means. No matter how good the indicators, no matter how accurate the statistics, nothing can be achieved without political will... [Women's advocates should instead ] consider putting their efforts into developing

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37. Gosta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1991.

strategies for monitoring and measuring progress toward the achievement of the Beijing Platform of Action (BPA), rather than abandoning it for the MDGs. After all, the BPA is theoretically consistent (which the MDGs are not) includes all the MDGs and already has a constituency of support in an array of women's organisations and networks, research and training centers, media and communications programmes, international campaigns, not to mention mechanisms within bureaucracies at every level already working on the follow-up to the BPA... Moreover, all of this must be done in the awareness of the ways in which the spread of neo-liberalism, religious fundamentalism and the male backlash places all the Goals in jeopardy.

By endorsing the MDGs, alongside the global-scale neoliberal institutions - including most of the UN - the campaigners are making a mistake. Working seriously, bottom-up, with the existing anti-poverty, global justice movements, would constitute a much wiser use of resources, energy and political commitment.

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