

The making of the Millennium Development Goals: human development meets results-based management in an imperfect world

Abstract

This paper argues that two ideas – human development and results-based management – have been particularly significant in shaping the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These are unlikely intellectual bedfellows, but by charting the evolution of the MDGs their many influences are demonstrated. However, ideas are only one of the factors shaping the MDGs and the interests of many different actors are revealed in this account. At times the ideas of human development and results-based management were pursued but, when they challenge the interests of powerful groups or nations, their principles are compromised or assiduously avoided. With the wisdom of hindsight the relative coherence of the MDGs seems remarkable, given the processes from which they emerged. Perhaps the ‘Hiding Hand’ that Albert Hirschman identified 40 years ago guides some elements of global public policy over the long term.

Keywords – Millennium Development Goals, International Development Goals, global poverty, human development, results-based management, United Nations

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