

The Millennium Development Goals and Creating a Post-2015 Development Agenda

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The Millennium Development Goals

- When I began working in development in early 2001, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) had just been adopted.
- Even back then—with my limited, pre-doctoral knowledge, and in the face of very high hopes in UN agencies—I remember being skeptical that the goals would be attained in time.

The Millennium Development Goals

Eight MDGs:

1. To eradicate poverty and hunger,
2. To achieve universal primary education,
3. To promote gender equality and empower women,
4. To reduce child mortality,
5. To improve maternal health,
6. To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases,
7. To ensure environmental sustainability,
8. To develop a global partnership for development.

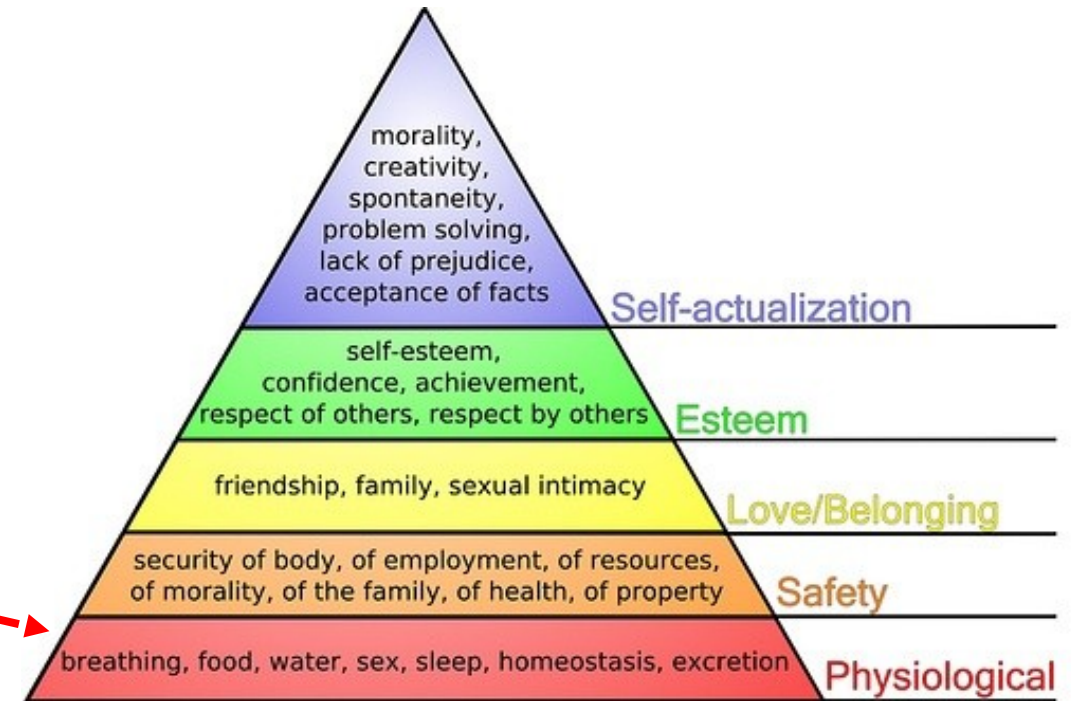
The Millennium Development Goals

- My skepticism has always been rooted in the belief, derived from psychology as well as economic theory and empirics, that there is such a thing as a *development path*.
- Specifically, the MDGs target a series of “goods,” the “consumption” of which varies considerably with the income of individuals.
- To begin to understand my position, recall Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.

The MDGs

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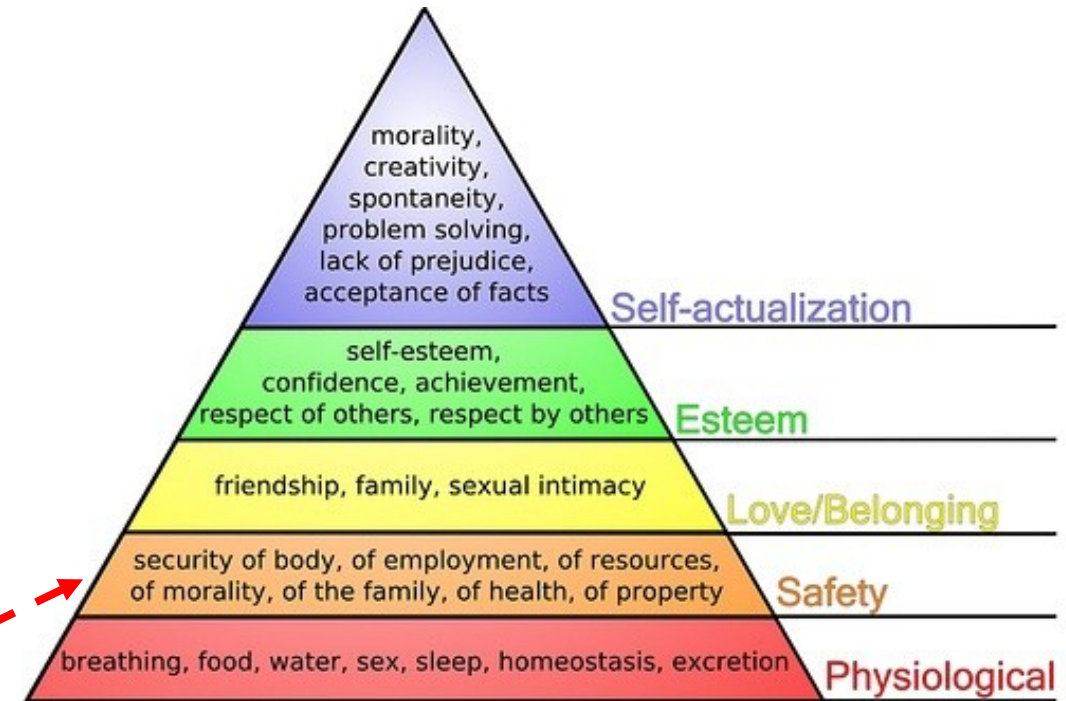
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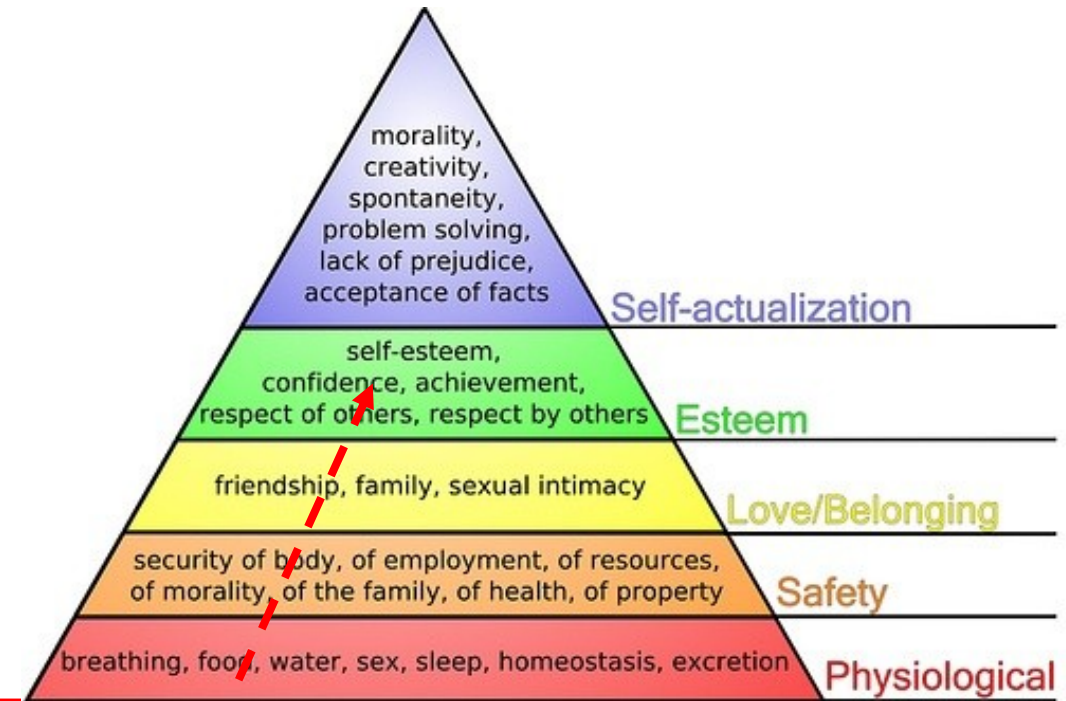
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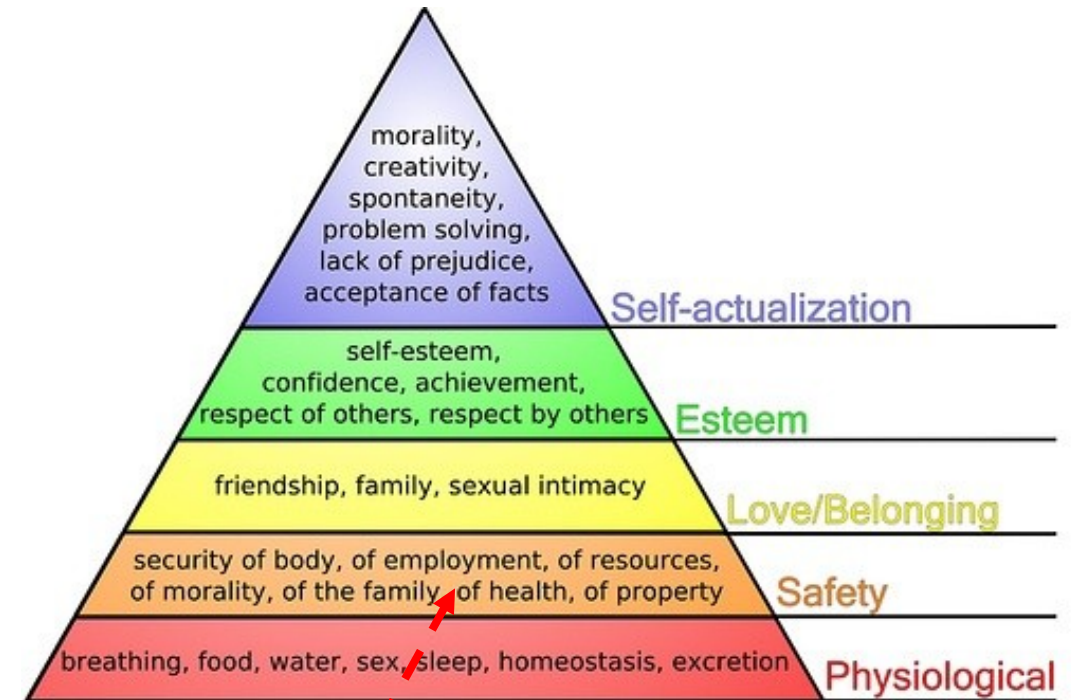
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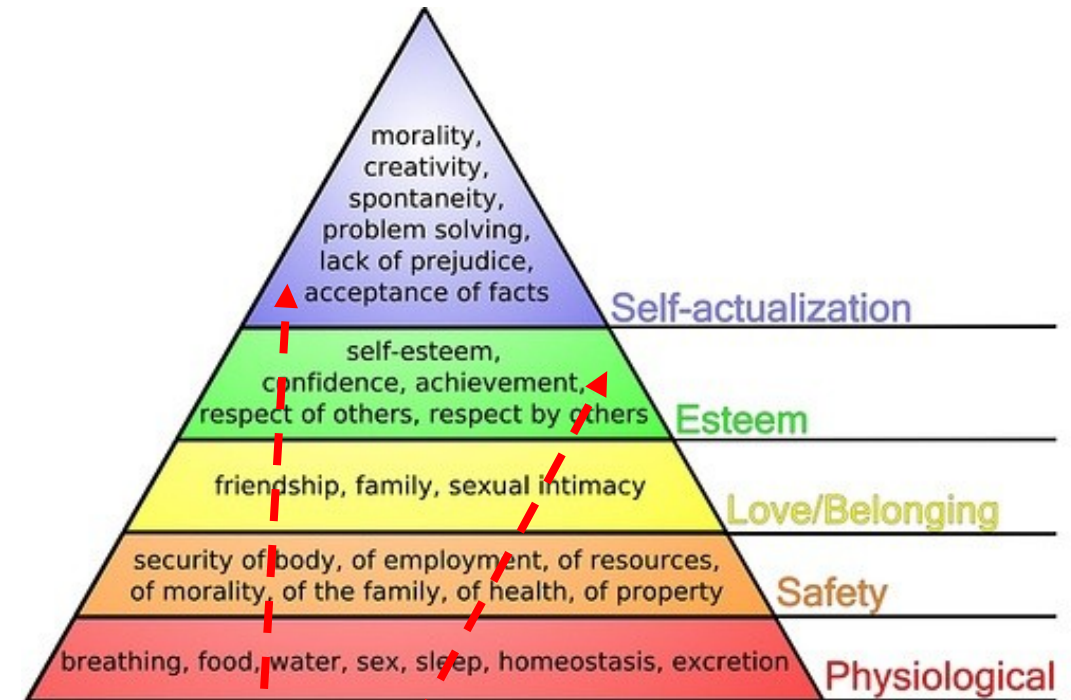
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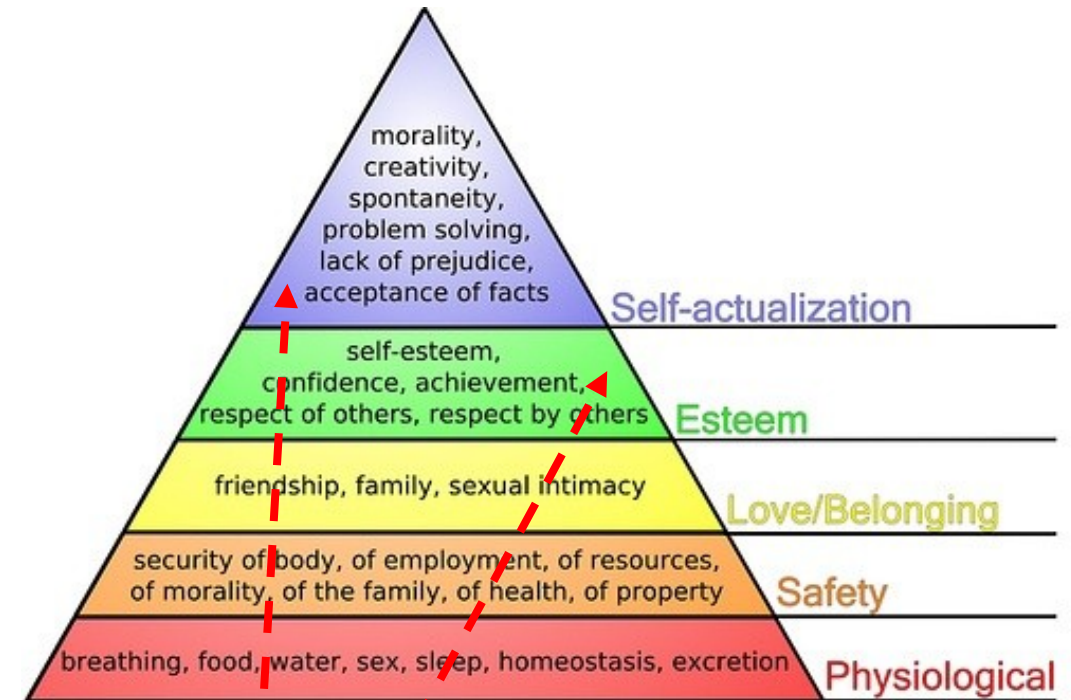
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(Self-actualization and esteem of the development bureaucrats who come up with these goals, that is!)

The MDGs

- Progress on the MDGs has been uneven.
- Where there has seemingly been progress, it has often been indistinguishable from general macroeconomic trends.
- In other cases, it is not always clear that the indicators used to measure progress measure what they claim to measure (e.g., school enrollment for goal 2, number of Internet users for goal 8).

Development Bloat

- The foregoing made me write a blog post about mission creep in the development-industrial complex since the 1950s.
- That in turn led to *Foreign Affairs* asking me for an article on the same topic.

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SEPTEMBER 16, 2013

DEVELOPMENT BLOAT

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Development Bloat

How Mission Creep Harms the Poor

By Marc F. Bellemare

JAN



The Development Path

To briefly articulate my Maslovian view of the development path:

1. History teaches us that developed countries have followed similar development paths.
2. Those paths have usually involved the satisfaction of needs of the majority in the order posited by Maslow's hierarchy of needs.
3. Development assistance should focus on the poorest individuals—the so-called bottom billion.
4. As a consequence, development efforts should focus on the most basic needs—food, nutrition, clean water, and shelter—rather than on the more advanced needs.

The Sustainable Development Goals

- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a new set of goals to replace the MDGs at the end of this year.
- Go big or go home: So far, the proposal for the SDGs includes 17 goals encompassing 169 targets.

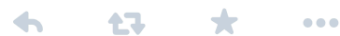


Charles Kenny
@charlesjkenny



Following

UN Statistics Division proposes 303 indicators tracking 169 targets in 18 goals grouped into 6 essential elements of the SDGs.



RETWEETS
13

FAVORITES
3



10:59 AM - 25 Feb 2015

The Sustainable Development Goals

As my friend and colleague Ed Carr wrote this week:

“First, [the SDGs] do nothing to focus us. With 303 indicators aimed at 169 targets, any reasonably talented program officer should be able to reverse justify any and all existing programming under this structure. ...

Second, these goals don't feel aspirational—but this is for a variety of reasons that I can lump into three categories: the impossible, the vague, and the ‘sounds good, but on second thought...’”

The Sustainable Development Goals

Here are a few SDG examples (the emphasis is mine):

Goal 4: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote *lifelong learning opportunities for all.*”

Goal 7: “Ensure access to *affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy* for all.”

Goal 11: “Make *cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.*”

Goal 17: “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the *global partnership for sustainable development.*”

The Sustainable Development Goals

- Again, all of those things are worthy *in and of themselves* (though note the “sustainable,” mantra, which is often impossible to define and means different things to different people...)
- But they also strike me as an educated, upper-class, coastal idea of what we should do for the world’s poor, which is not without reminding me of old-style colonialism.

Quo Vadis?

- So in an era where “scaling up” is one of the development policy buzzwords, my recommendation is: “Scale back.”
- In other words, development efforts need to refocus on basic needs.
- This is especially so given that for every dollar spent on lofty goals like “environmental sustainability,” there is an opportunity cost, and because spending a dollar on more basic needs has higher returns.

Quo Vadis?

- Let's take a simple example. There is no doubt in my mind that universal primary education is a worthy goal *in and of itself*.
- Except development goals are rarely in and of themselves. If the only jobs available are in agriculture, which does not require a great deal of human capital, why should people send their kids to school?
- Similarly, when nutritious food is scarce and children are malnourished, they are unlikely to learn anything in school.

Quo Vadis?

- All the while, I try to remain realistic while making my recommendation.
- This is especially so because, as an economist, I realize that my recommendations are driven almost exclusively by efficiency concerns.
- I also realize that ideological purity is the stuff of dictatorships, and not the stuff of democracies such as ours.

Quo Vadis?

- Finally, I realize that development policy is almost always subordinate to foreign policy.
- But even in the face of such constraints, I believe the United States has a moral duty to argue for a refocusing of development assistance.
- This is a bipartisan issue, not only because it is the fiscally responsible thing to do, it is also the humanitarian thing to do.