

Achieving the MDGs is about putting the people at the centre of development governance and practices.

The urgent need to pay attention to the forgotten nexus between applied research on Millennium Development Goals and the real gaps in their implementation: more practical steps are required.

by Sandro Calvani,¹

A year ago Giulio Quaggiotto from IFC made 13 propositions to make development aid work better. This is very much in line with the ideas developed in the Report of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Poverty & Development of which I am a member.

I think that Quaggiotto's innovative approach to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) good practices represents a most needed shift from the discussion on delays in the achievement of the UN MDGs, towards a urgently needed consultation and/or consensus on practical steps required to move from delayed implementation of the MDGs to accelerated result oriented policies and strategies. Furthermore Quaggiotto's propositions would also allow a very simple and constructive peer review of actions and changes in the governance of MDG policies. A transparent peer review, open to IGOs and NGOs at regional level, would make a real difference in understanding and resolving the tangled complexity of delays in MDGs implementation.

The Quaggiotto's propositions are the following ².

- 1. Think business models, not only cool applications.** What we need is the development sector equivalent of companies like Google or Amazon: innovators that radically disrupt the usual way of doing business.*
- 2. Free your data.** In the era of mash-ups and APIs, there is no excuse to keep proprietary control over data that could contribute to better policy making and reduce poverty.*
- 3. Fight the not invented here syndrome.** Leave duplication of efforts and the ivory tower syndrome to the Development 1.0 world. Use social media to scout the best ideas to achieve development results and catalyse diverse networks around them. Acknowledge that the best expertise might lie outside of your organization. Embrace open standards and make it easy for information to flow from one organization to another.*
- 4. Think “real simple” business processes, from fundraising to reporting.** Social media can radically simplify what are often unnecessarily bureaucratic processes that generate significant overheads. Free the energy to concentrate on your core mission.*

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² Original post available on IFC's Private Sector Development blog:
<http://psdblog.worldbank.org/psdblog/2009/05/a-development-20-manifesto.html>

5. Lower cost of failure. *It was difficult to justify before, it's indefensible now. There's no reason to sink millions that could finance development projects in expensive IT solutions when there are so many cheaper options available (from open source to the cloud).*

6. Fewer "lessons learned" documents, more open conversations about failures. *Create an environment where it is ok to fail and talk about failure, so long as you are serious about learning from your mistakes and you don't spend too much time following the wrong path. Fail often, fail quickly. Trust donors to understand that development is a complex issue.*

7. Embrace transparency. *You can now make it really simple to track how you are spending donor money. Let everyone hear the voices and experiences of people affected by your projects.*

8. What you don't have resources to do, others might jump at. *Social media are great at releasing volunteer energies around your mission. Engage and go beyond your traditional support base.*

9. Value (and plan for) conversations with your constituencies, at all levels. *Every employee in your organization now can and, most importantly, should want to interact with as many stakeholders as possible through social media to further your mission. Establish a constant dialogue with donors so they don't feel like they are ATM machines. Thousands of conversations a day should be a coveted objective, not a dreaded scenario.*

10. Plan for serendipity. *Do focus on results, but be open to get to them in unexpected ways, suggested by your the end users. Incorporate user-driven innovation in your proposals.*

11. Think about the full circle. *Found an innovative way to tackle a development issue? Go beyond the initial success. Use networks to scale up quickly. Make the connection between the results of your experimentation and the core mission of your organization obvious.*

12. Cast a wide net. *Your partners and colleagues are your filters to sift through unexpected sources of development knowledge. Collect snippets of information from multiple sources and highlight patterns among them. Use social media to tap into weak ties and bring together innovative perspectives to solve tough development issues.*

13. Go beyond polished documents. *Think visual. Documents and publications are not the natural unit of knowledge. Release unfinished products if this can help advance your cause and get others to contribute. A visual a la Gapminder can be more impactful on policy makers than a publication.*

Applied research and advanced training on MDGs should consider Quaggiotto's propositions and any other practical step that facilitate the acceleration of a comprehensive approach to changing needy people's life and allowing them to be protagonists of such change. Moving from too many theoretical studies and political consultations towards result oriented decision making and monitoring on development at grass root level, by the people and for the people concerned, might represent the core of the innovation and change of MDGs practices which might untangle the causes of the delays now observed in the MDGs implementation.

The ARCMDG at AIT will do its best to make the above mentioned priority shift happen.