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The Millennium Development Goals: a cross-sectoral analysis and principles for goal setting after 2015

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Executive summary

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) represent an unprecedented global consensus about measures to reduce poverty. The eight goals address targets to increase incomes; reduce hunger; achieve universal primary education; eliminate gender inequality; reduce maternal and child mortality; reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria; reverse the loss of natural resources and biodiversity; improve access to water, sanitation, and good housing; and establish effective global partnerships. Progress in some goals has been impressive; however, global targets will not be met in some regions, particularly sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia. As we approach the 2015 target date, there is considerable interest in assessment of the present goals and in consideration of the future of development goals after 2015.

This Commission has brought together sectoral experts on different MDGs from the London International Development Centre to identify cross-cutting challenges that have emerged from MDG implementation so far. This interdisciplinary approach differs from previous MDG studies that have either examined individual goals or made broad sociopolitical assessments of the MDGs as

a development mechanism. We used our analysis of cross-cutting challenges as the basis to identify a set of principles for future goal development, after 2015. We emphasise that this report is not an assessment of the MDGs; we focus deliberately on challenges with the implementation of the MDGs so as to inform future goal setting.

The MDGs are an assembly of sector-specific and often quite narrowly focused targets that have their various origins in development ideas and campaigns of the 1980s and 1990s. They were not derived from an inclusive analysis and prioritisation of development needs, and this is reflected in the absence from them of a range of key development issues. The variable progress recorded with goals and targets partly indicates a tendency over time to focus on a subset of targets that have proven easier to implement and monitor, or which have stronger ownership by international or national institutions, or both. Complexity and lack of ownership have been particular problems for new targets added later in the MDG process. We provide short analyses of each MDG for those seeking more depth and to set out the evidence for a cross-MDG analysis (webappendix).

Clearly the MDGs have had notable success in encouraging global political consensus, providing a focus

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