

## Complaint

Inadequacy of NAO scrutiny of

UK governments' commitments,  
their transparency on those commitments,  
the adequacy of their communication of those commitments, and of  
government progress reports on global poverty

Matt Berkley

12 December 2015

.....

## International commitments

*"We, the Heads of State and Government and heads of delegation...reaffirm our commitment to the Millennium Declaration.....and the outcomes of all the major UN conferences and summits in the economic, social, and environmental fields."*

Special Event Outcome Document

25 September 2013

<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Outcome%20documentMDG.pdf>

*"We, the Heads of State and Government, or our Representatives and the Representative of the European Community... decide to: ...*

*...**commit to** take action towards sustainably eradicating hunger **at the earliest possible date.***

***Ensure...action to fully realize** the target of Millennium Development Goal and **the 1996 World Food Summit goal**, namely to reduce respectively the proportion and the **number of people** who suffer from hunger **and malnutrition** by half by 2015."*

World Summit on Food Security, Rome 16-18 November 2009: Declaration

<http://www.commit4africa.org/declarations/1631/millennium/0/0>

*"Most people assume that the MDG targets and indicators were agreed in the Millennium Declaration."*

US Ambassador to the UN

26 August 2005

<https://www.globalpolicy.org/images/pdfs/0826bolton.pdf>

*"at the dawn of a new millennium...*

*We resolve...by...2015...to have reduced...child mortality by two thirds, **of their current rates**"*

[to about 3.6 million child deaths in 2015, or 10,000 deaths a day  
– not the 4.3 million of the MDG target]

<http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>

*"at the dawn of a new millennium,  
we set concrete goals...  
**These are the standards that we set.**"*

Remarks by the President at the Millennium Development Goals Summit  
22 September 2010

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/09/22/remarks-president-millennium-development-goals-summit-new-york-new-york>

*"U.N. Document Clarifies Development Goals, State's Silverberg Says*

*16 September 2005*

*New York – The negotiated final summit document expected to be adopted September 16 by the U.N. General Assembly clarifies that the Millennium Development Goals **(MDGs) are those agreed to by the United States and other U.N. members in the 2000 Millennium Declaration**, says Assistant Secretary of State Kristen Silverberg.*

*...Silverberg, who heads the State Department's Bureau of International Organization Affairs, said...the United States continues to "strongly support" the goals it agreed to in the Millennium Declaration...*

*"Sometimes people use [the term] MDGs to mean other things, in particular of a list of targets and indicators that were in a document the [U.N.] secretariat produced" following the Millennium Declaration, Silverberg said. **The United States did not negotiate that [1990-baseline "MDG"] document** or agree to it and neither did many other states. It is solely a document of the secretariat, she said.*

*..."The outcome [final summit] document clarifies the term MDGs, which means **goals in the [2000-baseline] Millennium Declaration**," she said."*

U.N. Document Clarifies Development Goals, State's Silverberg Says | IIP Digital  
<http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/article/2005/09/20050916110129aklennoccm0.3649256.html#ixzz3pPkGi19h>

*"**The EU** and its Member States remain **strongly committed** to the*

[2000-baseline]

**Millennium Declaration**"

European Union

8 January 2015

[http://eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article\\_15930\\_en.htm](http://eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_15930_en.htm)

I suggest that the NAO has not adequately held successive governments to account with respect to UK commitments at world summits, or with respect to transparency on those commitments.

The NAO has clearly also published misleading statements giving the impression that world leaders in 2000 committed themselves to the generally easier 1990 baselines in the later MDG framework.

I suggest that the complaint is serious enough to warrant consideration of the older material.

I am unaware of any information in the NAO's history showing that the NAO knew what the "international commitments" are.

Evidence for the following is at ungoals.org, in particular the first link on government commitments:

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Has aiming for the MDG targets amounted to "honouring international commitments"?

In 2000, the UK "resolved" with other nations to achieve what were presented as specific results, in the Millennium Declaration.

*"We resolve...by...2015...to have reduced...child mortality by two thirds,  
**of their current rates**"*

<http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>

There is no 1990 baseline in that Declaration, and the only reference to a baseline is to "current rates" for mortality reductions.

The Millennium Development Goal framework with easier 1990 baselines was, contrary to popular belief, not agreed by the UN in 2000.

The General Assembly did not mention "Millennium Development Goals" or the 1990-baseline targets in 2001.

The Secretary-General proposed them on 6 September 2001.

On 6 November 2001 the heads of UN development agencies authorised the following:

*"In two cases—maternal mortality and under-five mortality—the term "current rates" is used, directly specifying a 2000 baseline. For the remainder, the targets are stated in the form of "to halve by 2015..." This **would imply a 2000 baseline year of the Millennium Declaration.** After discussions within the UN system and with other partners, the issues have been resolved in favour of 1990 serving as the baseline year [for the MDGs]."*

UN Development Group

[committee of heads of UN funds, programmes and departments concerned with development chaired by head of UN Development Programme, Mark Malloch Brown]

Country Reporting on the Millennium Development Goals

Guidance Note to UN country representatives, October 2001

[http://web.archive.org/web/\\*/http://undg.org/archive\\_docs/2356-English.doc](http://web.archive.org/web/*/http://undg.org/archive_docs/2356-English.doc)

Sent by UNDG chairman Mark Malloch Brown and three other heads of UN agencies on 6 November 2001:

[http://web.archive.org/web/\\*/http://undg.org/archive\\_docs/1607-MDGs - letter -  
\\_MDGs - letter.pdf](http://web.archive.org/web/*/http://undg.org/archive_docs/1607-MDGs_-_letter_-_MDGs_-_letter.pdf)

On 14 December 2001 the Assembly welcomed the 58-page report containing the MDG framework, but did not say whether it welcomed these targets.

It recommended

*"that the "road map" be considered as a useful guide in the implementation of the Millennium Declaration."*

The resolution, 56/95, did not mention "MDGs", eight goals, or 1990. Far from explicitly endorsing the new targets, it called for the Declaration, which has a 2000 baseline, to be better publicised.

[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/56/95&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/56/95&Lang=E)

On 21 December 2001 and subsequently the Assembly reaffirmed the Millennium Declaration.

In 2002 the Earth Summit agreed a plan envisaging cutting child and maternal mortality rates from the "prevailing rate in 2000".

*"The core **aims for education and health** are stated in the*

[2000-baseline]

*UN **Millennium Declaration.**"*

Gleneagles Agreement

Signed by:

Presidents Bush, Putin, Chirac, Berlusconi;

Prime Ministers Koizumi, Blair, Martin;

Chancellor Schroeder; President of the European Commission Barroso

July 2005

[http://web.archive.org/web/20051027075956/http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/PostG8\\_Gl\\_eagles\\_Communique,0.pdf](http://web.archive.org/web/20051027075956/http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/PostG8_Gl_eagles_Communique,0.pdf)

In 2005 the US Government published a statement on the day of the World Summit that the leaders in fact meant by "Millennium Development Goals" the goals in the Declaration.

In any case, leaders in 2005 reaffirmed the Declaration.

*"We strongly reiterate our determination to ensure the timely and full realization of the development goals and objectives agreed at the major United Nations conferences and summits, including **those agreed at the Millennium Summit that are described as the Millennium Development Goals...**" [!]*

[http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Resources/Attach/Indicators/ares60\\_1\\_2005summit\\_eng.pdf](http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Resources/Attach/Indicators/ares60_1_2005summit_eng.pdf)

The General Assembly reaffirmed the Declaration in 2013. EU member states confirmed that they were "strongly committed" to the Declaration in 2015.

*"We, the Heads of State and Government and high-level representatives... **recommit** to fully implement the internationally agreed **commitments** related to Africa's development needs, **particularly** those contained in the United Nations **Millennium Declaration**..."*

Future We Want  
United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development  
Rio de Janeiro  
22 June 2012  
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/futurewewant.html>

The General Assembly in 2013 also reaffirmed the outcomes of the relevant major UN conferences and summits, including the commitment of 1996, restated in 2002 and 2009, to halve the number of hungry people to around 400 million or, using the current FAO methodology, to around 500 million.

*"**The EU** and its Member States reaffirm their **commitment to the Millennium Declaration**"*

EU@UN -  
EU Council Conclusions on the Overarching Post 2015 Agenda  
25 June 2013  
[http://eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article\\_13692\\_en.htm](http://eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_13692_en.htm)

In July 2015 leaders at Addis Ababa, and subsequently the General Assembly, recommitted to the 2002 Monterrey Consensus, which called for

- a) economic conditions necessary to fulfil the (2000-baseline) Millennium Declaration goals, and
- b) a global information campaign publicising those and other internationally agreed goals.

Resolution adopted at the UN General Assembly  
Heads of State and Government and High Representatives  
25 September 2015:

[Title: *...implementation of...the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits ...*

*Follow-up to the outcome of the [2000-baseline] Millennium Summit...*]

*Our shared principles and commitments ...*

*10. The new Agenda is...grounded in...the [2000-baseline] Millennium Declaration..."*

*We ...reaffirm the outcomes of all major United Nations conferences and summits..."*

[http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/L.1](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/L.1)

## NAO scrutiny of reporting

### Poverty

DFID Annual Report 2013-4, page 30:

*"About 700 million fewer people lived in extreme poverty conditions in 2010 compared to 1990."*

It is not clear that the NAO has adequately challenged such statements. DFID has supplied no information on inflation faced by extremely poor people, and nor has the World Bank. The World Bank figures on which the claim appears to be based do not take changing needs into account.

DFID Annual Report 2013-4: *"The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) include 2 targets in this area. The first is to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1.25 a day. This target was met 5 years ahead of the deadline"*

The figures are in fact largely on spending rather than income.

These are the MDG1a monitoring team's methodology paper and the UN Statistics Division official information on MDG indicators:

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DEC/Resources/DevelopingworldispoorerQJE.pdf>

<http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Metadata.aspx>

It is not hard to find criticism of the World Bank claims:

*"Angus Deaton, the Princeton economist and persistent critic of a poverty line that he argues has been misleading for years. "You've got a line that no one knows where to put it, PPPs that change, and underlying data that is bad," he said. "It is sort of a statistical problem from hell.""*

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/81b0ac66-61e5-11e5-9846-de406ccb37f2.html#axzz3me7tDD3e>

*"there are a number of methodological problems of which **one needs to be aware**. ...the computation of PPP exchange rates is based on comparing the costs, in different countries, of a basket of goods and services...that reflects the average consumption patterns in a country. This is **not generally appropriate** when our concern is with comparing **living standards for the poor**"*

[http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPA/Resources/429966-1259774805724/Poverty\\_Inequality\\_Handbook\\_Ch10.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPA/Resources/429966-1259774805724/Poverty_Inequality_Handbook_Ch10.pdf)

*"It **must be pointed out** that the international poverty line is **not based** on a global common **basket of basic goods and services**"*

Jan Vandemoortele, UN Development Programme, 2002

Co-chair of the inter-agency group which chose the MDG targets in 2001.

<http://wstf.go.ke/watersource/Downloads/001.%20Are%20We%20Really%20Reducing%20Global%20Poverty.pdf>

*"Supposing, for example, that when a third world country opened up its economy to the world its agricultural workers were required to become more mechanised.*

*If...workers...moved to city slums ... the incomes of the people who moved could well be higher than they were in their villages.*

*However... they .... might have to pay rent and fares for the first time... "*

Richard Douthwaite

2000

<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2000/jun/14/guardiansocietysupplement3>

*"...**failure to specify** an international poverty line (or national poverty lines) that are meaningful in the sense that they correspond to the real cost of achieving **basic human requirements**"*

Sanjay Reddy

Letter to Financial Times

November 19, 2007

[ft.com/cms/s/0/9c9aa4f6-9640-11dc-b7ec-0000779fd2ac.html](http://ft.com/cms/s/0/9c9aa4f6-9640-11dc-b7ec-0000779fd2ac.html)

*"That unit [at the World Bank] which assists countries, trains the staff, and helps them to compile [poverty] data, how many persons are working there? Four half-time. For the world. **It's a joke.** They're very competent, they're very good. But **it's not serious** ... The uncertainty of 1.3 billion [people living in poverty] is **plus or minus half a billion.** And we will not know whether the MDGs [millennium development goals] have been achieved until 2019, the later part. We only get poverty measurements every fifth year."*

***These issues are well known,** he says, but still underappreciated and infrequently discussed. **"It's like the emperor's new clothes,** and I'm the little child saying 'He's nude! He's nude!'"*

<http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/may/17/hans-rosling-data-population-fertility>

## Hunger

DFID Annual Report 2013-4:

*"The world is on track to reach the hunger target by 2015"*

The basis for that statement is not clear.

Page 22 says,

*"Target 1.C: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger. Global progress: Lagging."*

DFID's report, on page 22, mentions the MDG indicator "Prevalence of underweight children under 5 years of age" as being used by DFID. That indicator usually indicates slower progress than the "hunger" indicator, for the same UN target.

## Water

This passage in the 2013-14 report is misleading:

*"Target 7.C: By 2015, halve the proportion of people without sustainable access to **safe drinking water** and basic sanitation. Global progress: Water target met ahead of schedule. Sanitation target lagging.*

*Achieving the water target in 2010 was a **major success**. Since 1990, 2.1 billion people gained access to improved drinking water sources."*

Two problems. First, "improved sources" is not the actual target.

*"While target 7.C explicitly refers to access to safe drinking water, **the indicator does not measure quality directly**, and the assumption that improved sources are more likely to provide safe water than unimproved sources is **misleading**."*

Human Rights and MDGs in Practice:  
A review of country strategies and reporting  
United Nations

2010

<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/HRAndMDGsInPractice.pdf>

"At the current rate of progress, **672 million** people will not use improved drinking water sources in 2015. It is **likely that many hundreds of millions more** will still lack sustainable access to **safe** drinking water"

UNICEF/WHO 2011

[www.wssinfo.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/resources/report\\_wash\\_low.pdf](http://www.wssinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/resources/report_wash_low.pdf)

Second, the MDG target as written does not have a 1990 baseline.

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DFID Annual Report 2013-4:

*"Results achieved by sector – Governance and security*

*DFID will tackle the underlying causes of poverty by supporting strong and inclusive economic, social and political institutions and **empowered citizens**. ...*

*The importance of governance and security is recognised in the Millennium Declaration<sup>23</sup> (September 2000):*

*"We will spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development."*

*The May 2013 report of the High Level Panel on the post-2015 Development Agenda co-chaired by David*

*Cameron has further reinforced this message:*

*"...people the world over expect their governments to be honest, **accountable**, and responsive to their needs." "*

We can ask: Accountable for what?

.....

NAO material

"Our public audit perspective helps Parliament **hold government to account...**

The Department's priorities, in its 2014 Business Plan, are to:...

- **honour international commitments**, including to support actions to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs);
- drive **transparency**, value for money and **open government...**"

The performance of the Department for International Development 2013-14  
December 2014

<https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/DFID-Departmental-overview1.pdf>

.....

"the UK, along with all 193 UN member states, is committed to meeting 8 Millennium Development Goals, established following the Millennium Summit of the UN in 2000."

[Misleading because the NAO omits that the UK is committed to the solemn promises of that Summit, reaffirmed by the General Assembly in 2013 and EU member states in 2015.]

"These goals, each with specific targets, form a blueprint agreed to by all the world's countries and all the world's leading development institutions and have galvanised their efforts in meeting the needs of the world's poorest countries."

"Countries where people improved their rights to land and property"

"**DFID's Strategic Vision** for Girls and Women aims to unlock the potential of girls and women, to stop poverty before it starts.

It **empowers girls and women, enabling them to have voice, choice and control.**"

" Case study

Accountability and civil society programmes

in Tanzania

As part of its **accountability and civil society programmes** in Tanzania, DFID supported over 5 million Tanzanian women and men to:

- **understand what services they should expect;**
- *access services including water, education and health; and*
- **hold authorities to account** for poor performance."

*"DFID's objective is to encourage sustainable economic growth and development by promoting peace, the rule of law, an absence of corruption, the recognition of property rights and institutions that serve all the people, not just a select few.*

*To achieve this DFID works to promote open societies and open economies enabling states to function for their citizens and for citizens to lead their own development.*

*DFID describes its approach as 'the golden thread of development'."*

*"Examples of outcomes reported by DFID for the period 2011-12 to 2013-14*

*Helped 85.8 million people to **hold their authorities to account** and have a say in their communities' development, exceeding the target of 40 million."*

Department for International Development short guide

July 2015

<https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Department-for-International-Development-short-guide1.pdf>

Comments: In how many countries did people "improve their rights" to information on government commitments, as the NAO puts it, to hold governments to account - on such things as millions of child deaths?

Is it not disempowering of girls and women for the UK Government to understate, obscure or omit government commitments on child and maternal deaths?

**"The Department's objectives are largely drawn from the goals agreed within the United Nation's Millennium Declaration of 2000."**

[! - I am unaware of DFID documents of which this is true in respect of any of the 2000-baseline goals in the Declaration]

**"It pursues the eight global Millennium Development Goals set by the United Nations in 2000."** [!]

Department for International Development  
Financial Management  
Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General  
6 April 2011  
<http://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/1011820.pdf>

*"The purpose and scope of this review*

*1 During the period 1 October 2011 to 27 January 2012, the National Audit Office (NAO) carried*

*out an examination of a sample of DFID's data systems used to report performance against Business Plan indicators and operational data systems. This involved a detailed review of:*

- the match between the indicators DFID publishes, the operational data it uses to run itself, and the priorities and key business areas within DFID;*
- the processes and controls used to select, collate, process and analyse the data; and*
- the reporting of results...*

*...we analysed the indicators that DFID is intending to use to monitor its performance."*

The NAO here used words significantly likely to be wrongly taken as meaning the MDG targets for 2015 are in the Declaration:

*"...the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). 2"*

Footnote 2 reads:

*"These are eight goals **which form the Millennium Declaration**, [!] produced by the UN, that all 191 UN Member States aim to achieve by 2015. The MDGs are derived from this Declaration, and all have specific targets and indicators"*

Information assurance [!] summary reports: Department for International Development  
[www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Information\\_assurance\\_DfID.pdf](http://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Information_assurance_DfID.pdf)

*"The Millennium Development Goals were adopted by member countries of the. United Nations in 2000"*

<https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2003/01/0203351es.pdf>

31 Jan 2003

*"The Millennium Development Goals were adopted by member countries of the United Nations in 2000 and provide global consensus on objectives for addressing poverty."*

National Audit Office Report (HC 664, 2003-04):

Department for International Development: Responding to HIV/AIDS

2004

<https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2004/06/0304664es.pdf>

" the United Nations adoption in 2000 of Millennium Development Goals"

"The Goals were set out in a Millennium Declaration adopted by all 189 members of the United Nations at the Millennium Summit in September 2000."

"A complementary set of development targets, the **Millennium Development Goals** (Appendix 1), were **adopted by the United Nations in 2000** 20. While similar to the International Development Targets, they are not the same. There is a general acceptance within DFID that the Millennium Development Goals are slightly better focused in a number of areas and since they have broad acceptance within the United Nations, they now provide a global consensus on objectives for addressing poverty. Consequently the emphasis within DFID is moving towards these Goals. However, since the International Development Targets have up to 2001 provided the basis for objective setting within DFID, for the purposes of our study we have taken them as the agreed goals adopted by the international development community"

***The eight Millennium Development Goals were adopted by the United Nations at the Millennium Summit*** in November 2000 (General Assembly Resolution 55/2)...Further information on the Goals can be found at <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2001/pi1380.doc.htm>."

NAO report (HC 739 2001-2002):

Department for International Development: Performance Management - Helping to Reduce World Poverty

<https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2002/04/0102739.pdf>

*"The Millennium Development Goals aim to halve by 2015 the proportion of the world's population living in extreme poverty. They were adopted by member countries of the United Nations in 2000 and provide global consensus on objectives for addressing poverty."*

Joint Targets

NAO 2005

REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL | HC 453 Session 2005-2006 | 14 October 2005

<https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2005/10/0506453.pdf>

*"Glossary*

*The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), agreed at the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000, are eight goals to be achieved by 2015..."*

FOURTH VALIDATION COMPENDIUM REPORT: VOLUME 1

REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL

HC 22-I Session 2007-2008

19 December 2007

<https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2007/12/070822i.pdf>

*"Millennium Development Goals*

*A set of eight international development goals for 2015, adopted by the international community in the UN Millennium Declaration in September 2000."*

<https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2008/02/07086.pdf>