



## **MDGs: From bad to worse?**

09/21/10

by Angela Zarro - SID

Interview with Roberto Savio\*

In this interview, Roberto Savio provides his critical reading of the entire MDGs process, explaining why this is considered a 'missed opportunity', what didn't work and how things should evolve in order to achieve them.

AZ: What is your reading of the entire MDGs process and the way it has performed so far?

RS: My reading of the entire MDG process is that it started poorly and is now much worse. First, at the time of the preparation of the assembly of heads of state in 2000, the data used for the projection and the calculation of the MDGs were five years old, meaning that the process – the Millennium Summit as it was called in a 'modest and understated way' started with all data and proposals which were insufficient for the goals established. Even for those which were sufficient, there has never been any chance to achieve the goals, because there never was sufficient political will and enough resources to achieve them.

Of course the fact that China, and in some way India, were able to develop/to perform better – the population of the these two countries represents close to the 40 % of human kind - makes the situation look better. But if we look at the situation in Africa, Latin America and Eastern Asia, it is clear that there hasn't been any real progress in attaining the MDGs.

Secondly, with development institutions increasingly become bureaucratic – which is the death of utopia- it is this bureaucracy that has kept the process alive. It is the ministries of foreign affairs (ndr. rather than technical people) that deal with the MDGs, with the result that the mechanism which is kept alive is entirely devoid of content and any hope.

The figures are there and I am very curious to see what will happen after the upcoming review summit. I don't think that the MDGs will be met before the 2035.

AZ: Critical voices – also among those people involved in the process – describe the MDGs as a 'missed opportunity'. What do you think?

RS: Of course they are a missed opportunity. The entire development process is a missed opportunity. The MDGs process is just the most visible part of it. Visible because it implies the engagement of heads of state from all over the world. The MDGs are the further evidence that this kind of process – be it the G20 or any other summits – have lost sense. The ministers attend these meetings, take commitments and then forget about them.

The Social Watch, as you know, regularly publishes analyses about the missed opportunities of development and every time there is a new analysis, the situation is described as getting worse.

In the last 20 years, since the collapse of the Berlin wall and the end of the threat of communism, capitalism was considered - not as a victory of one part of the world (Western Europe and the United States) against another part of the world (Eastern Europe and Russia) – but rather a victory of an

ideology over another one; because of that victory, all aspects and themes having to do with the losing ideology were discarded. Social responsibility, solidarity, accountability, anything having to do with the development paradigm was discarded and a new paradigm – based on competition, profits and the market – prevailed. The real aim of such a paradigm – that is also the core of globalisation – is ‘to have more’, while the paradigm of development is ‘to be more’. We moved from ‘to be more’ to ‘have more’, which are 2 entirely different things.

As a result, global finance, global investment and global speculation have prevailed: today development cooperation is at most the 0.10 % of the global speculation. This tells you how the world is divided. I always say that if we could take back the concept of global security – that is now conceived merely in military terms - and reach an agreement according to which the 90 % of the global military budget goes for military security and 10 % of the budget is used for global human security – which if you speak with military people they will say they have no problem – this 10 % of military expenses would be enough to solve all problems of the world development strategy.

AZ: If you say that many of these international summits have lost sense, what alternative do you envisage? Do you see the need to rebuild the international architecture or rather to fill it in with more content?

RS: I think we need to understand what international relations means. Today international relations comprises everything. Today we see a situation where a country – such as Italy for instance - which is contributing far less than others in terms of international cooperation, can declare to be ahead of every European country.

Now of course if you include the costs of military missions (ex. in Afghanistan or Iraq) within international cooperation, then the overall budget is higher than countries, such as Sweden, who spend less on military missions and more for development aid. So the point is on what does international cooperation mean. This is the debate that needs to happen.

AZ: Which are your expectations about the outcomes of the 2010 review summit?

RS: Well, I am afraid that things will not go further than hoped. There will be some general declaration on the need for a better world and for a greater effort of cooperation. I think it will be long on themes and short of substance.

AZ: Which priorities and policies are necessary to be undertaken between now and the 2015 in order to maximise the achievements of the MDGs?

RS: First there should be some debate on what the MDGs mean. Is it the tip of an iceberg of a wider problem of hedonistic approach? Who can do this? The international community have lost strength. The World Social Forum is in crisis, there is nothing new really coming up. Organisations like ATTAC, which were very active, are declining. The civil society at global level is declining and this, from my point of view, is because there is a disconnect between civil society organisations and the citizens. These organisations are becoming increasingly self referential and they are not doing enough to connect with the people on the streets. So they don't represent much in terms of power. The power is in the hands of the politicians, and the political class is totally subject to the financial market and, to minor extent, to the economic market. The result is that, because of the financial crisis, we are having a monetary school of solutions to the budget crisis, that means cuts everywhere, with no political will to invest in anything. I don't think that there is any real possibility of making any significant change between now and 2015. There are only two items of the development strategy people are still passionate about: one is the environment and the other one is the employment (or unemployment) that is where people are starting to feel their personal life are affected directly. I am not very optimistic.

AZ: In your opinion, what do the MDGs miss or need to include in terms of topics, strategies, partnerships?

RS: We are facing a structural crisis. As long as we think that development – as a paradigm to achieve a better society – is only a quantitative problem, and we look at a better society only in quantitative and not in qualitative terms, we are talking about a world that is going in the opposite direction of what the MDGs mean.

I don't see people getting out of this trap of getting rich, and of the greed of market. In my view the current crisis will continue, at least, for another 5 years and we will not be out of the tunnel before the 2015, only when there will be a reaction to the crisis that will hopefully provoke a new debate. Right now we are in a crisis and there are no leaders to get out of it.

AZ: In other words, we need to wait until the end of the economic crisis to see some kind of change? Who will promote such change?

RS: Yes, I think there will be a new perception of politics, and a new awareness that capitalism needs to be kept under control by some rules and principles and we will eventually go back to a kind of social democratic society which has made of development an important point in the past. All social democratic countries (like Finland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden), are built on the principle that wealth needs to be better distributed and there is some sense of social justice, if not solidarity, at least social justice. Social justice in today's world is dead.

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Roberto Savio