



**Consequential Omission:
How demography shapes development – lessons from the MDGs for the SDGs**

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The paper examines how demographic change over the past years influenced progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and how projected demographic changes in the coming years are likely to shape progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The paper demonstrates that regardless of how development targets are formulated – as absolute targets, relative targets or universal targets – demographic change inevitably has an important implication. But it is not just the changes in the number of people, but also changes in the geographic distribution of people, and changes in the age structures of people that matter. Furthermore, the static effects of these changes are complemented by dynamic effects and feedback loops. For instance, progress in secondary education of girls, can bring down fertility levels, and contribute to better health, and reinforce higher levels of educational attainment in turn. Furthermore, by lowering fertility levels, it can contribute to slower population growth and promote more sustainable development pathways.

The paper argues that neglecting the demographic change and projections in the formulation of the MDGs, as well as the efforts to promote progress towards the MDGs was a consequential omission. To ensure that we formulate goals and targets which will improve the human condition, it is essential that we systematically take account of demographic change. Without knowledge of how many people are living and how their numbers will change, where they are living and how geographic distribution will change, and how old they are and how age structures will change, it is impossible to understand or meet the needs of people. We need to count people to make people count.

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