



Development
Progress

Project Note

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Introducing Development Progress: understanding what works and why



This and other Development Progress materials are available at developmentprogress.org

Development Progress is an ODI project that aims to measure, understand and communicate where and how progress has been made in development.

ODI is the UK's leading independent think tank on international development and humanitarian issues. Further ODI materials are available at odi.org.uk

The project aims to:

- Explore and refine definitions of development progress, set out new metrics for measurement, and enhance analytical tools.
- Identify and produce compelling case studies, thereby deepening understanding of what has enabled and driven progress at a country level.
- Engage with key actors from all regions to inform and influence development debates and policy decisions.

We aim to learn from what has worked in order to engage with rising new issues in the development landscape, among them progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the post-2015 development agenda, inequality, the rise of the global South, the green economy and climate change, employment and structural transformation, demographic changes, and vulnerability to shocks.

The project builds on an earlier phase of work, carried out between 2009 and 2011, which produced case studies identifying and analysing progress in 24 countries, and presented a report card on MDGs. This second phase deepens the analysis, seeking to inform debates about key policy issues and make the complexity of development more accessible.

Why look at progress?

Negative news about development often crowds out the positive. Despite serious difficulties, there have been significant positive changes in the lives of the majority of the poor in recent years.

Globally, poverty rates have fallen over the past 20 years, from 43 per cent of the population globally living in extreme poverty (under US\$1.25 per day) in 1990 to 22 per cent in 2008. The number of low-income countries fell from 60 in 2003 to 39 in 2009. Major strides have been made in Africa in particular in the past decade. Six of the world's 10 fastest growing economies between 2001 and 2010 were African. Child deaths across the continent have declined at an accelerating pace.

Understanding what has made life better in some countries can help support progress elsewhere, illustrating potential trade-offs and opportunities for virtuous circles. Demonstrating and understanding 'what works' is becoming increasingly important for the international development community as austerity budgets throughout the developed world diminish appetite for development assistance and sharpen the focus on results and value for money.

Progress as wellbeing

The research is built on the understanding that development progress is not just about economic growth. The Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission recently set out a similar broad approach, advocating the use of measures of societal wellbeing, as well as those of economic, environmental, and social sustainability.

Based on other research on multidimensional progress, the project has identified eight dimensions of wellbeing to frame our analysis of progress. These dimensions have intrinsic and instrumental value – each is important to wellbeing in its own right but also instrumental to the achievements in other dimensions:

- Material living standards
- Health
- Education
- Environment
- Employment
- Political voice
- Social cohesion
- Security

Research agenda

Our research agenda includes five components.

1. **Measuring Progress** attempts to deepen the measurement of progress. Using quantitative indicators, we aim to identify progress within and across the eight dimensions of wellbeing, making the parameters and assumptions underlying various progress measures more explicit. The analysis will measure overall attainments, their distribution, rates and patterns of change, and identify high-performing countries.
2. **Exploring Progress** will produce 28 case studies examining drivers of progress in specific countries that have performed highly across one or more of eight dimensions of wellbeing. The case studies will deepen our understanding of how progress has been achieved in relation to particularly topical and complex policy problems within different country contexts.
3. **Financing Progress** will consider how domestic and foreign, and public and private, financial resources contribute to progress as part of the case studies. Central to this work will be the role of different modes of finance in enabling development outcomes, in order to understand different options for financing progress, their relationship with each other, and policy decisions required to achieve more and/or better financing.

4. **Valuing Progress** looks at how better to incorporate poor people's perspectives on progress in funding decisions. This component aims to develop an improved metric to measure outcomes in a standard way, and identify which – of the possible outcomes that aid spending could achieve – poor people would value the most. This information could feed into allocation of resources and planning of interventions, to ensure that the 'value' in 'value for money' is informed by poor people themselves.
5. **Trade and economic policy** focuses on Aid for Trade and reform of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The research on Aid for Trade examines the circumstances under which Aid for Trade is most effective in driving progress in the areas of trade and growth. It also aims to draw lessons on how the BRICs and other emerging economies have used trade to further economic development. Work on CAP reform aims to inspire a CAP that is coherent with development goals through analysis of the political economy of the reform process, examining how to embed policy coherence for development in CAP reform, the effects of the greening of CAP on developing countries, and the relationship between CAP and price volatility.

Planned outputs are:

- **Case studies** – approximately 28 case studies, including both in-country and desk-based work across eight dimensions of wellbeing
- **Thematic papers** – a number of thematic papers or policy briefs on findings emerging from the measurement and case-study work
- **Workshops** – a series of interactive workshops with different stakeholder groups to communicate and discuss project topics and findings
- **Website and web portal** – a website presenting research findings and a portal drawing on existing databases, allowing users to make their own value judgments about how to measure progress
- **Communications materials** – a series of blogs, videos, podcasts and social media such as Twitter communicating research outputs
- **Synthesis reports** – summarising findings from across the components

Photo: Lifting women out of poverty, Gujarat, India, 2010. © Gates Foundation
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