FPSI: Draft Comments: 2014

UN DEVELOPMENT GOALS: One of the things RBA allows you to do is diagnose what people mean when they use words like "goal." The word "goal" can mean almost anything. (See appendix C of the book.)

The 8 UN Development "goals" are all MEANS and not ENDS. The give-away is that they all include action verbs, "eradicate, achieve, promote, reduce, improve, combat and ensure." The last one doesn't have an action verb but one is implied.

These are actually priority strategies. Remember the definition of a strategy, "a collection of actions with a reasoned chance of producing some desired effect (turning a curve)" The simple way to see the inadequacy of this list is to imagine that all 8 strategies have been fully implemented and achieved. Now what?

You can see that eradicating extreme poverty and hunger - while certainly a noble and important thing to do - is not the same thing as "All children or all people free of hunger."
Reducing child mortality (actually turning the curve is what they mean here) is not the same thing as "All children are healthy." and so forth.
Many of these strategies could easily be restated as ends, for example "Women are empowered and equal members of society." or "Sustainable environment"
"Global partnership for development" is hopelessly a means and not ends statement.

This all raises the question, of course, about what is meant by the word "development." Development is itself a strategy or means statement......unless we ask instead, "What is a developed country, region, community?" This question can produce some interesting and powerful answers. What if we were to list the top ten characteristics of a "developed nation?" What would be on that list? It would likely include a range of population quality of life results (e.g. People are healthy, Communities are safe, Children are well educated etc..) Whatever is on that list, it is likely that the 8 UN development "goals" would be worthwhile strategies to achieve "development" defined in this way.