

How the Millennium Development Goals are Unfair to Africa

William Easterly

Professor of Economics, NYU

Visiting Fellow, Brookings Institution

Non-Resident Fellow, Center for Global
Development

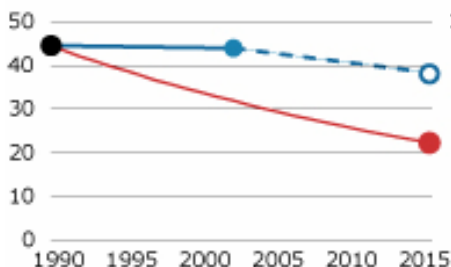
February 2008

Africa uniquely failing to meet ALL Millennium Development Goals

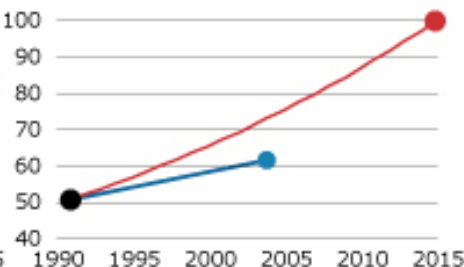
- “Africa...is the only continent not on track to meet any of the goals of the Millennium Declaration by 2015.” (UN World Summit Declaration, 2005)
- “in Africa... the world is furthest behind in progress to fulfil {the MDGs}...” (Blair Commission for Africa 2005)
- “Sub-Saharan Africa, which at current trends will fall short of all the goals.” (World Bank and IMF Global Monitoring Report 2005)
- “Sub-Saharan Africa... is off track to meet every Millennium Development Goal.” (UN Millennium Project, Investing in Development, Main Report, 2005)
- “At the midway point between their adoption in 2000 and the 2015 target date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, sub-Saharan Africa is not on track to achieve any of the Goals.” (United Nations, Africa and the Millennium Development Goals, 2007)
- “However, at the mid point of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), sub-Saharan Africa is the only region which, at current rates, will meet none of the MDG targets by 2015.” Africa Progress Panel (follow-up to Blair Commission for Africa, communiqué, 2007)
- “We are deeply concerned that Africa as a whole is not on track to meet the MDGs by 2015.” (UN Africa Steering Group, incl UNSG, EC Prez, IMF MD, World Bank Prez, September 2007)
- Davos 2008: Queen Rania, Bono, Bill Gates declare “development emergency” because of failure to meet MDGs in “bottom billion”

Sub-Saharan Africa

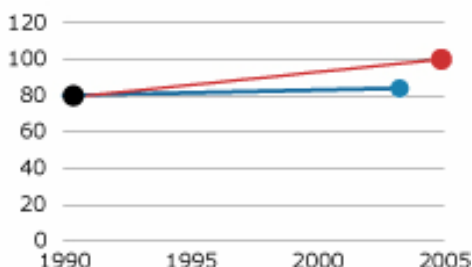
Goal 1 - People living on less than \$1 a day (%)



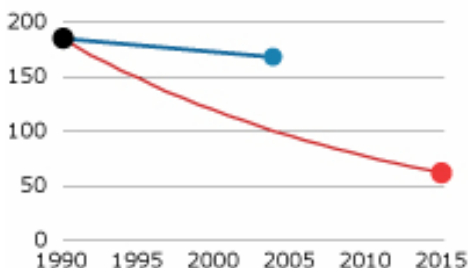
Goal 2 - Primary completion rate total (%)



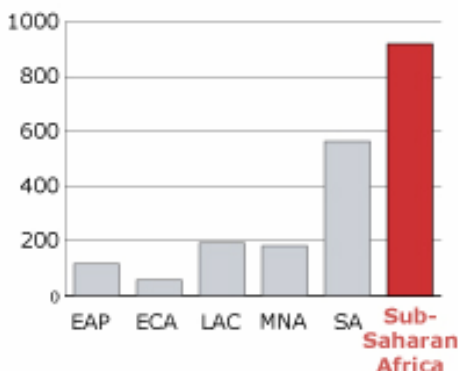
Goal 3 - Ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education (%)



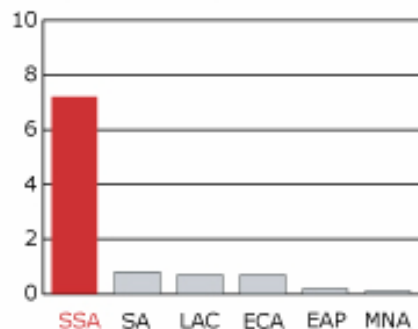
Goal 4 - Under 5 mortality (deaths per 1,000)



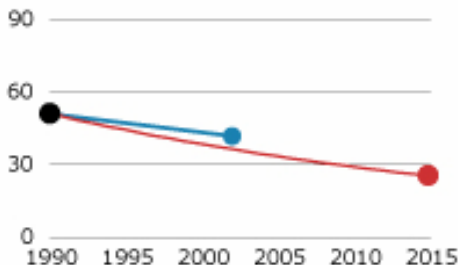
Goal 5 - Maternal mortality ratio, (modeled estimate, per 100,000 live births, 2000)



Goal 6 - Prevalence of HIV, (% of population ages 15-49, 2003)



Goal 7 - Improved water source (% of population without access)



Three (arbitrary?) choices to make in MDG target setting

- **Usual Indicator** (“% with clean water”) vs. **Reverse Indicator** (“% without clean water”)
- **Levels** (Universal primary enrollment) vs. **Changes** (Change in poverty) – levels don’t make much sense because they ignore constraints posed by initial conditions
- **Percent Change** (used in several MDGs, e.g. cut poverty rate by half) vs. **Absolute Change** (not used but makes some sense in welfare terms: %CH only appropriate if marginal disutility of 1 more person in poverty is strongly diminishing in level of poverty)
- Why are different choices made for different goals?

Three other important issues in MDGs design

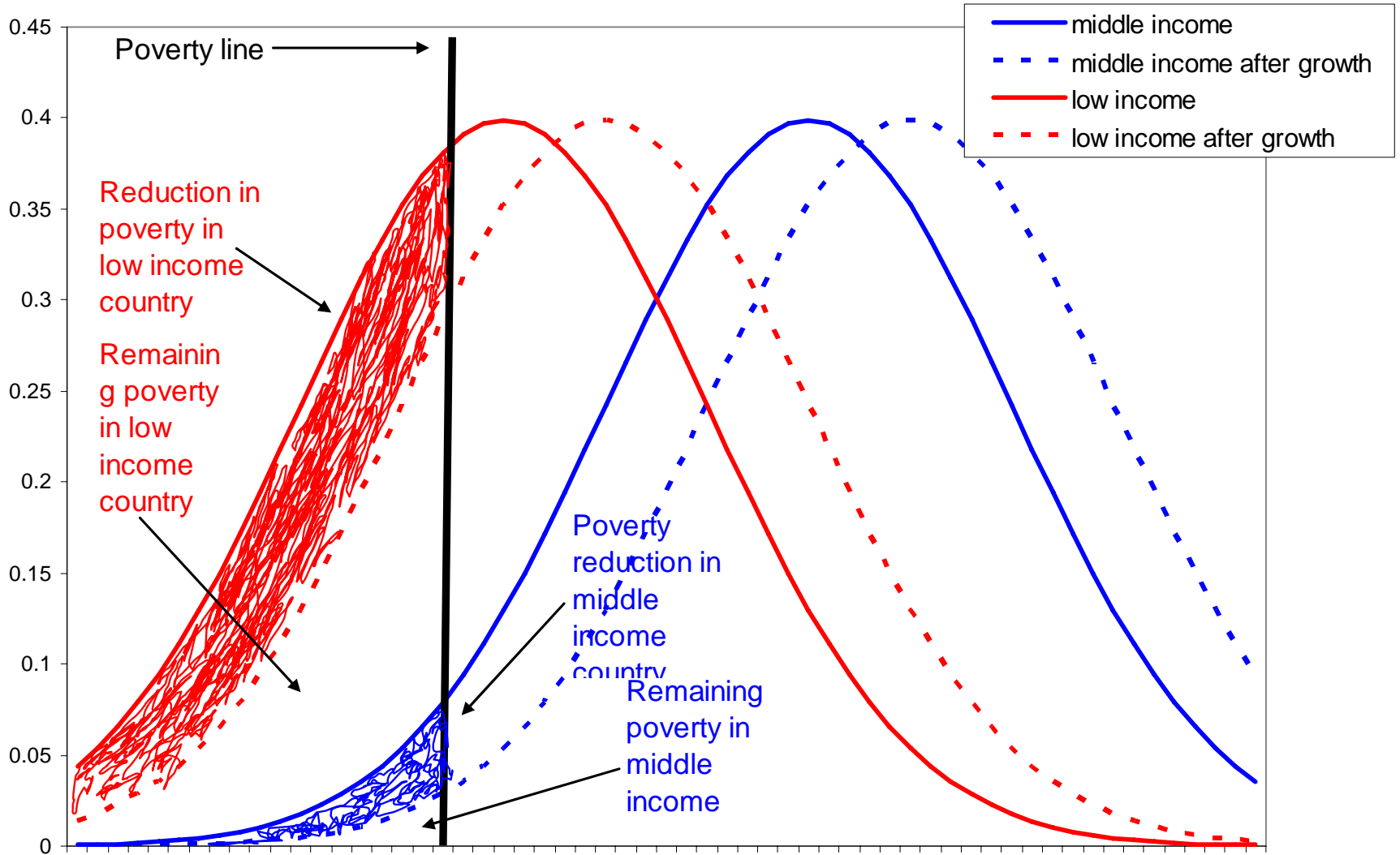
- Choice of benchmark year (1990 in MDGs, although exercise started in 2000) – Africa started off behind because it had bad growth in 1990s.
- Data availability/reliability (missing/unreliable data on trends in maternal mortality and HIV Prevalence, not to mention other indicators)
- Redundancy across goals (universal enrollment == gender equality in enrollment)

Review of unfairness to Africa MDG by MDG

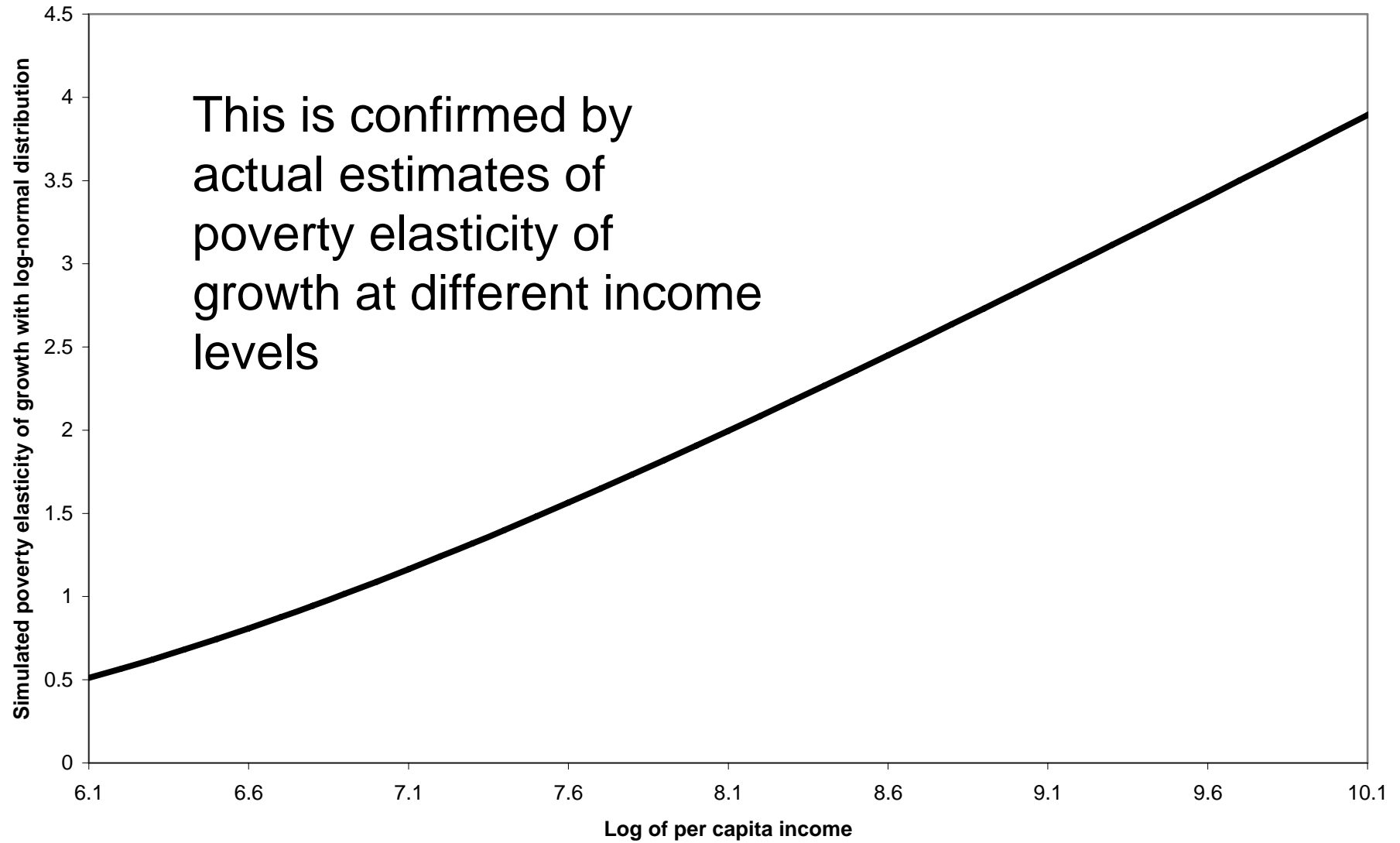
MDG#1: Cut poverty rate in half by year 2015

- The lower is average per capita income, the lower MECHANICALLY is percentage reduction in poverty rate for a given GDP per capita growth rate.
- Only assumption necessary: income is distributed log normal within countries (widely confirmed by distribution research)
- To show this, see next graph

Effect of the same income growth on poverty with different initial conditions



Simulated poverty elasticity of growth and Per Capita Income

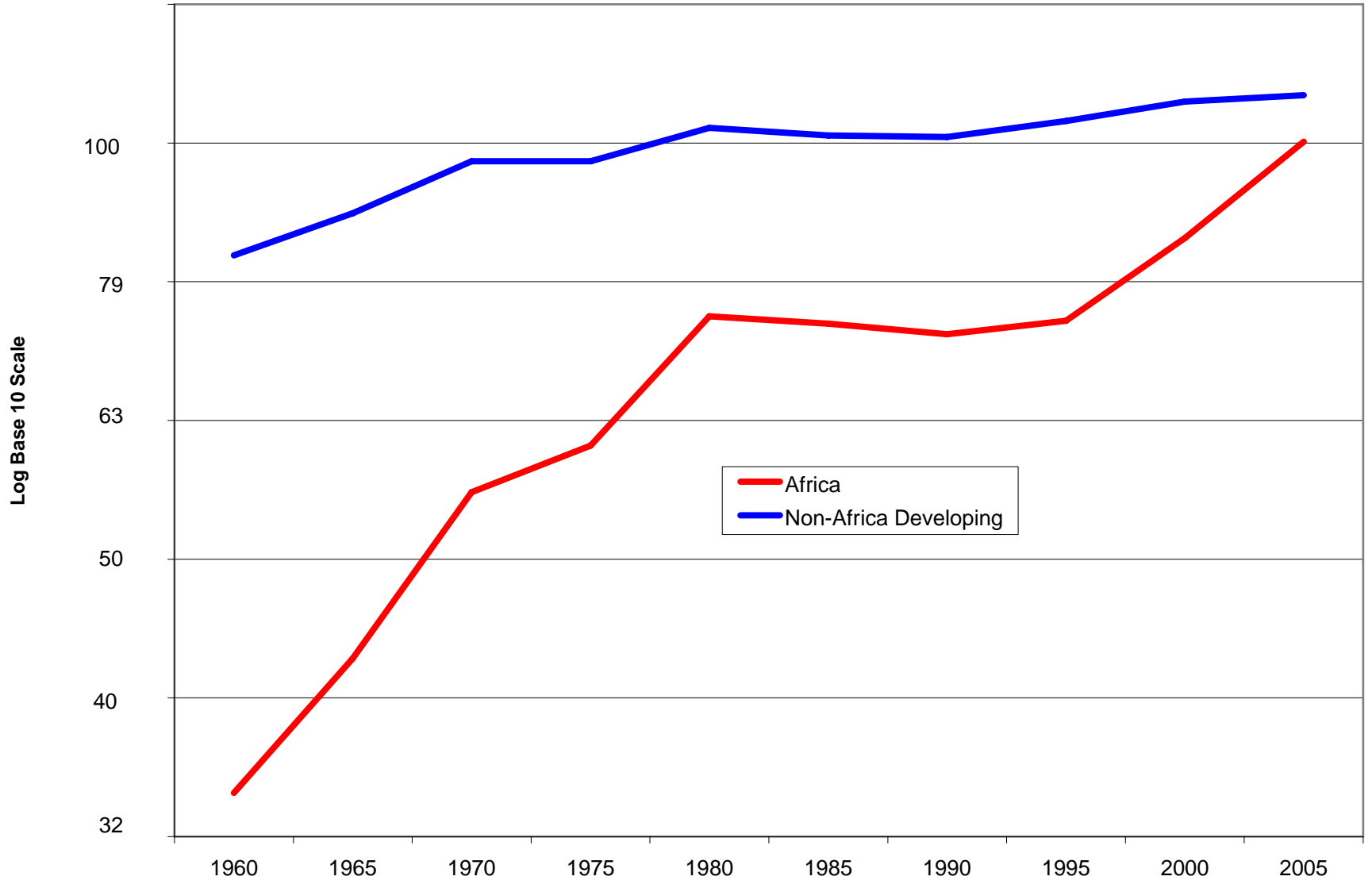


Design of poverty MDG means that even high African growth is labeled a “failure”

- African GDP has been growing at 5-6 percent, 2000-2006 (3-4 percent per capita), highest in African history.
- Is this a failure?
- “In 2006, Africa’s growth stood at 5.4% ... far short of the 7% annual growth that needs to be sustained to make substantial inroads into poverty reduction.” (Blair Panel)
- World Bank and IMF (2005) say required growth *per capita* is 6 percent for 17 African countries. Anything less than this (which has only been obtained in the top 5 percent of all decade growth episodes 1965-2005) is “failure to meet MDG#1”

**MDG#2: Achieve universal
primary enrollment by 2015**

Gross Primary Enrollment (Log Scale) in Africa and Other Developing Countries



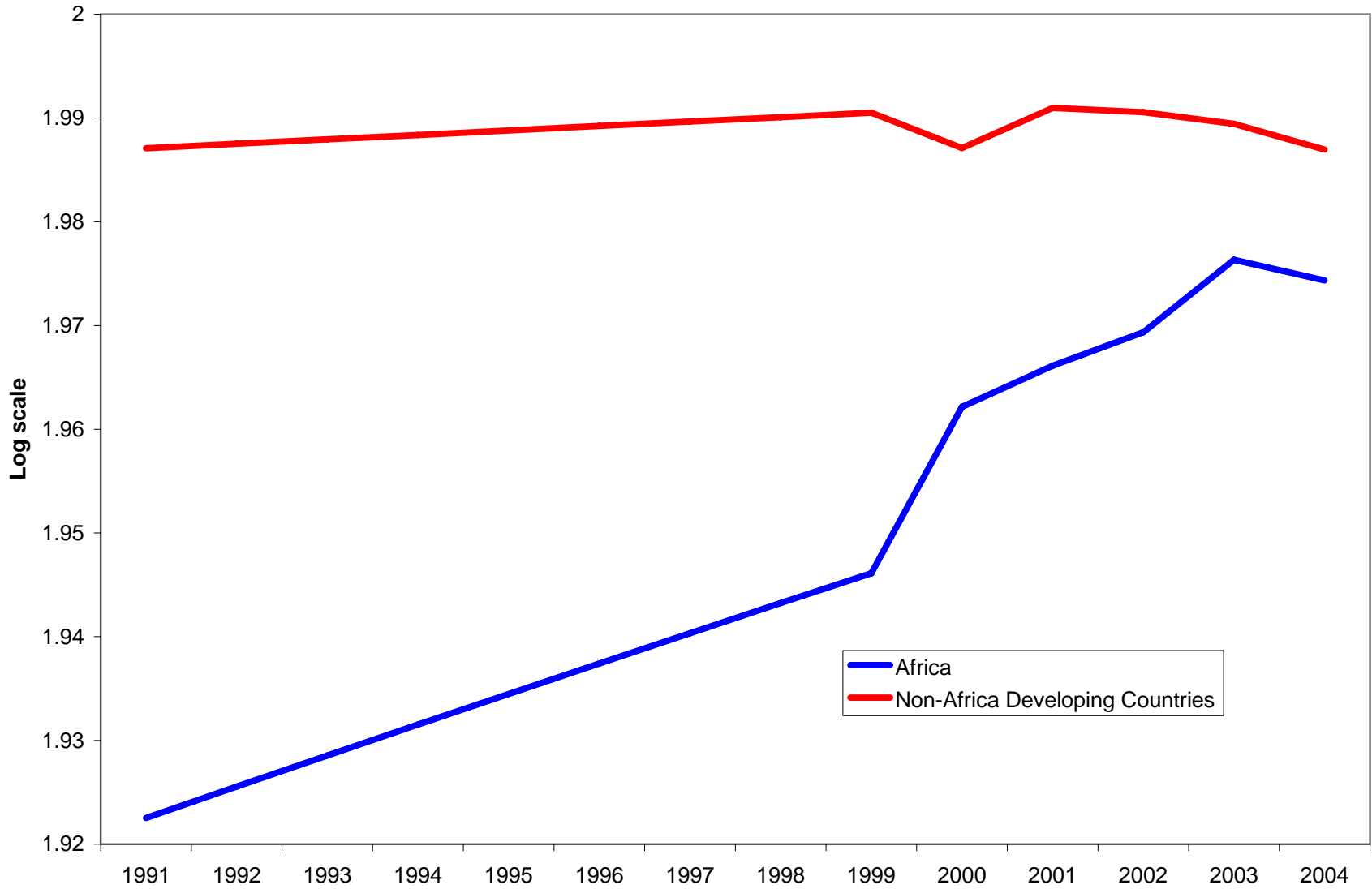
Primary Enrollment: How to Turn Bad News into Good News

- Good news: Africa has been converging to rest of world in primary enrollment (both in relative and absolute terms).
- Good news: African enrollment increases are far more rapid than what rich countries achieved in their history (Michael Clemens, "Long walk to school")
- But to meet universal enrollment level, it would take increases in enrollment even more rapid than THAT.
- Anything less than that is considered "failure to meet MDG"

MDG#3: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2015

- Redundancy with MDG#2 for primary enrollment.
- Level target rather than changes target

Female to male primary enrollment (log scale)



Good news into bad news again

- Good news: Africa is catching up to other developing countries in gender equality in primary and secondary education
- Yet again, failure to obtain level target under Gender MDG turns success into failure.

**MDG#4: Reduce by two thirds
the mortality rate among children
under five**

Historical evidence suggests reducing child mortality by 2/3 is harder if mortality starts high

Under-5 mortality changes over 25 years

Percent reduction
greater than or
equal to 2/3

Percent reduction
less than 2/3

Total

Under-5 mortality
above Africa
median in 1990

29

231

260

Under-5 mortality
below Africa
median in 1990

149

245

394

Total

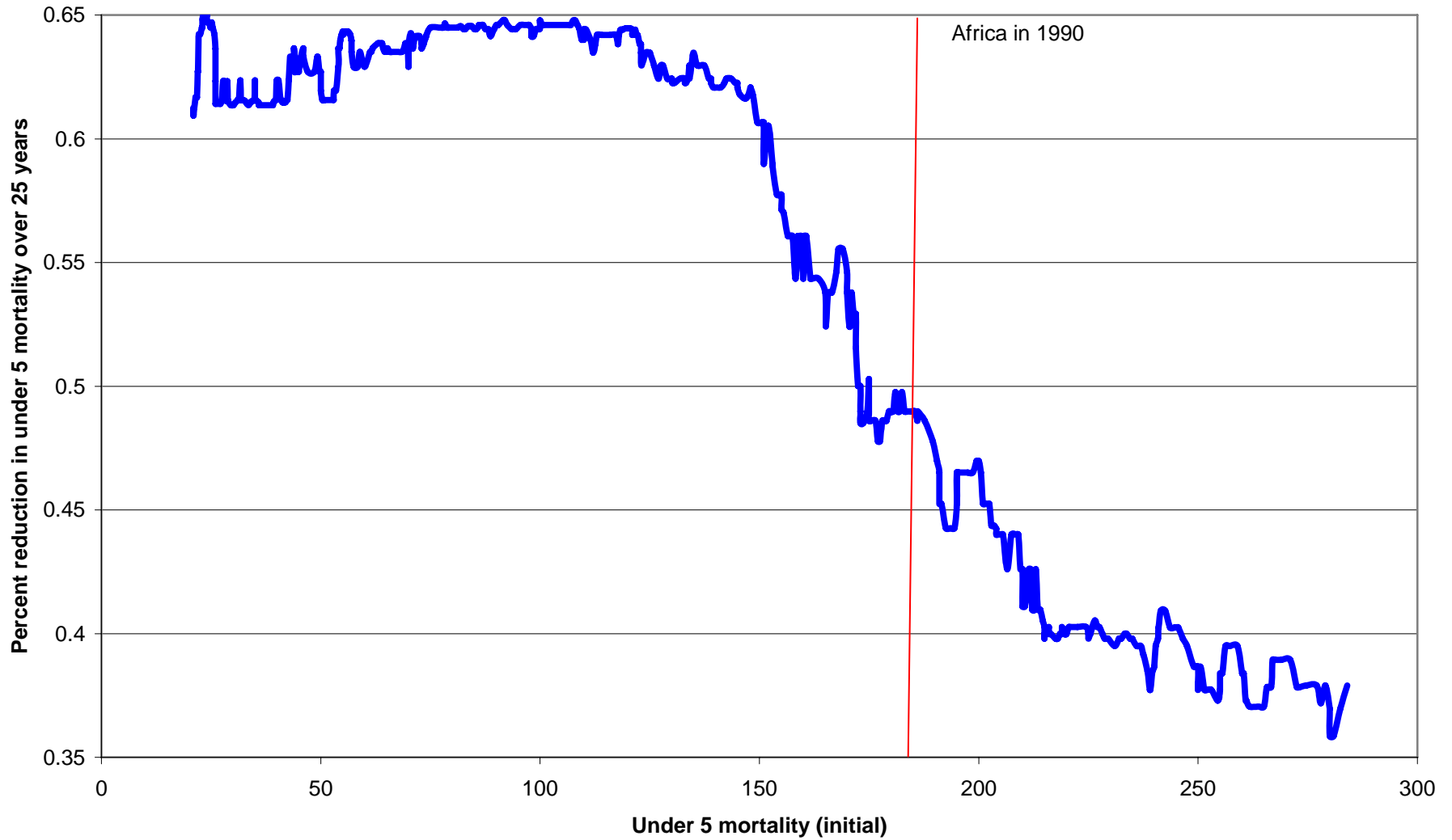
178

476

654

	Percent reduction greater than or equal to 2/3	Percent reduction less than 2/3	Total
Under-5 mortality above Africa median in 1990	29	231	260
Under-5 mortality below Africa median in 1990	149	245	394
Total	178	476	654

Percent reduction in under 5 mortality, 1960-2005, over 25 year period (100 observation moving median excluding gulf oil states)



Monitoring without data

- MDG#5: Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio
- MDG #6: Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS

In search of trend data on maternal mortality and AIDS

- I went to World Bank web site: “Global Data Monitoring Information System, Tools for Monitoring MDGs”
- And clicked on indicators “maternal mortality” and “HIV prevalence” for Sub-Saharan Africa...
- ... and I got the following:

The page cannot be displayed

There is a problem with the page you are trying to reach and it cannot be displayed.

Sub-Saharan Africa: figures from World Bank MDG Indicators Data Site

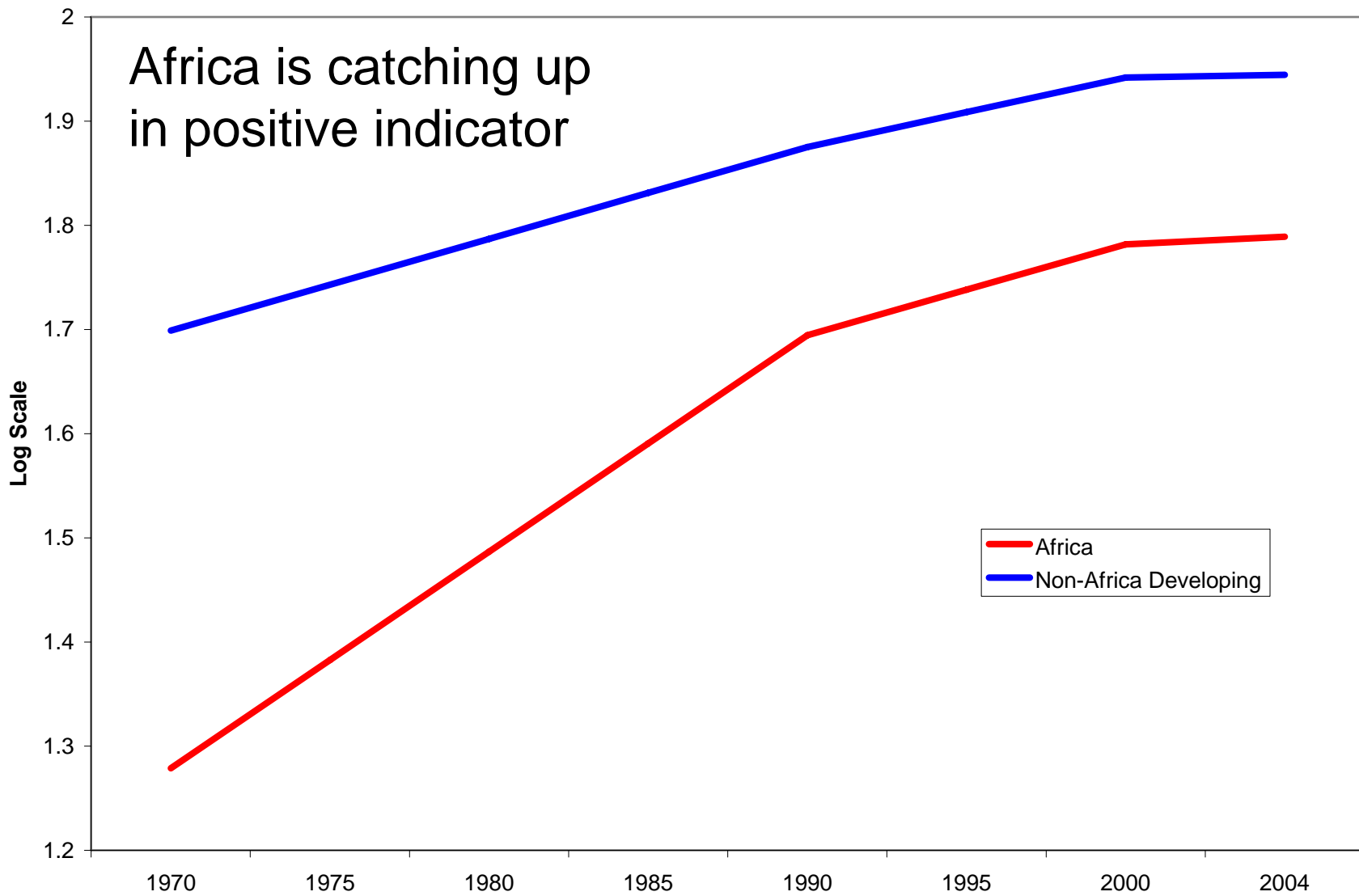
	Maternal mortality ratio	Prevalence of HIV
1990
1991
1992
1993
1994
1995
1996
1997
1998
1999
2000	920.858578276524	..
2001
2002
2003	..	6
2004
2005	..	6

Even when there are no data,
Africa is still said to be failing

MDG#7: Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water

- The goal is defined as percent change in proportion “WITHOUT” clean water, whereas the usual development indicator is proportion “WITH”
- “WITHOUT” makes Africa look worse on this goal than “WITH” would have in percent change terms.
- Which indicator is better to measure percent progress? It seems arbitrary (except that “WITH” has always been the indicator published in development statistics)

Percent with clean water



Summary for all indicators

Whether it's easier (+) or harder (-) for Africa to meet MDGs than other regions, given worse initial conditions

	Usual indicator		Reverse Indicator		Level
	Percentage change	Absolute change	Percent change	Absolute change	
Poverty rate	-	+	+	+	-
Primary enrollment	+	+	-	+	-
Gender equality in primary enrollment	+	+	+	+	-
Gender equality in secondary enrollment	+	+	+	+	-
Child mortality	-	+	-	+	-
Maternal mortality	No Data				
HIV Prevalence		No Data			
Clean water	+	+	-	+	-

MDG formulation highlighted in yellow

Summary of African achievements downplayed by MDG design

- Last 6 years of good growth in Africa
- Africa relatively catching up to other developing countries on primary education, gender equality, and clean water
- Africa's absolute reduction in child mortality

Interpretations

- Was making Africa look worse intentional or accidental?
- Bad Intentional – suggested by positive model of aid agency behavior in which agencies exaggerate the negative to increase their own funding
- Good Intentional – suggested by altruistic model in which agencies want more aid and effort for Africa
- Accidental – goals that were formulated at global level were later applied to regional and country level, with unintended consequence of making it harder for Africa to meet MDGs than other regions.
- Are MDGs performance measures of success or failure, or are they inducements to increase effort in aid agencies and in the West? Both angles seem to feature in policy discussions. Neither seems well designed.

Truth or Consequences

- Whatever the reason, it seems wrong to downplay African achievements and make them look worse...
- ...adverse consequences for global investment flows of “Africa always fails” stereotype
- ...also perpetuating stereotype “Africa needs to be rescued by West”
- Let’s give proper credit for African achievements whenever and wherever they happen.