

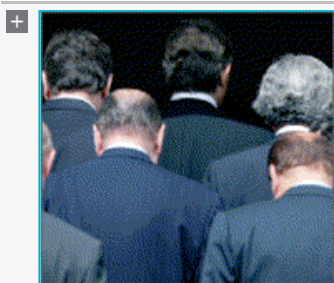
## Correspondence

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## 2009 was not a “dead year” for G8's health agenda

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Richard Horton (Oct 10, p 1215)<sup>1</sup> quotes our earlier Comment<sup>2</sup> when defining 2009 as “something of a dead year in G8 history”, attributing failures to “internal Italian political distractions”. Our point was that Italy's handicaps with respect to its chairmanship resulted from cuts in official development aid (ODA), and we pinpointed opportunities overlooked by the Government.



[Full-size image \(15K\)](#) Corbis

Nevertheless, the Summit's global health agenda was advanced, integrating the work of G8's health experts and the four avenues they advocated: promoting “a comprehensive and integrated approach to achieve health-related MDGs”; strengthening health systems towards universal access; recognising “health as an outcome of all policies”; and increasing aid and improving accountability.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, substantial improvements in the commitment-monitoring mechanism established at Toyako, Japan, in 2008 will facilitate more transparent measurement of G8 performance, separate ODA from other inputs, and standardise data reporting.<sup>3</sup>

Explicit reference to “the removal of barriers to access for all women”,<sup>4</sup> introduced in the G8 communiqué, represents another step towards health-system effectiveness and maternal mortality reduction.

In calling for coordinated development policies inspired by the Paris Declaration, the G8 does respond to Horton's concern for “the catastrophic failure in progress towards the Millennium Development Goals”.<sup>1</sup> However, statements cannot stimulate progress unless working methods change. To “walk the talk”, global leaders must abandon rhetoric-driven communiqués and engage in verifiable, binding agreements based on medium-term and long-term plans with financial coverage. Strong commitment and effective action for universal health coverage is possibly the single most significant and concrete objective to be pursued.

Advancement probably rests with the G20 rather than a G8 at its lowest credibility, undoubtedly worsened by the poor ODA record of the 2009 hosting country.

I declare that I have no conflicts of interest.

## References

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