

GUURE

hermes

ACHIEVING THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

This article provides a reflection on the prospects of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Sub-Saharan Africa in line with the challenges posed by the current socioeconomic and political realities at national, regional and global levels. The article departs from the commonly observed reality that the MDGs have played a significant role in putting the poverty reduction and its financing at the center of international debates on development. It is also observed that, although there is no sufficient evi-

dence to link the MDGs to the development progress made in the last decade, some sub-Saharan African countries have made significant progress towards achieving the MDGs while some others are still struggling¹. The statistics on indicators as set forth in the Declaration on MDGs may be reported as progressing satisfactorily in most countries of the region. However, the article posits that many other considerations should be factored in for the achievement of the MDGs in Sub-Saharan Africa but also and mainly for their sustainability. The article goes beyond the progress in terms of

EGIDE
RWAMATWARA

economic growth and focuses on the importance of political stability derived from good governance, transparency and accountability, democracy and respect of human rights, popular participation in policy and decision making, peace and security at national and regional levels, development and efficient management of human capital as prerequisites for a sound and sustainable development for the region. These will constitute the basis of our reflection on assessing the prospects and challenges of achieving the MDGs in Sub-Saharan Africa.

PROGRESS TOWARDS ACHIEVING THE MDGs IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

The overall assessment of progress made in achieving the MDGs at a global level seems to satisfy the expectations. In his introduction to the 2011 MDGs report, Mr Ban Ki-Moon, the United Nations Secretary-General states:

“Already the MDGs have helped to lift millions of people out of poverty, save lives and ensure that children attend school. They have reduced maternal deaths, expanded opportunities for women, increased access to clean water and freed many people from deadly and debilitating diseases”².

This message of hope from the UN Secretary-General is moderated by his observation that:

“... we still have a long way to go in empowering women and girls, promoting sustainable development, and protecting the most vulnerable from the devastating effects of multiple crises, be they conflicts, natural disasters or volatility in prices for food and energy”³.

SAF
hermes

VICEPRESIDENT FOR AFRICA, PAX ROMANA INTERNATIONAL. SOCIOLOGIST AND ANTHROPOLOGIST AND DOCTORAL CANDIDATE IN SOCIOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE, HARARE; SENIOR HUMAN RESOURCES ASSISTANT, WHO/OMS OFFICE IN CONGO-BRAZZAVILLE.

“Of the developing regions, Sub-Saharan Africa faces the greatest challenge of meeting the MDGs”.

In this regard, the UN Secretary-General recognizes the importance of peace and political stability and other socioeconomic and political factors which create a conducive environment for the achievement of the MDGs. These constitute the major challenge of the MDGs achievement and sustainability in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The 2011 MDGs report summarizes the progress made on each goal in relation to its targets and highlights the shortfalls and challenges experienced or forecasted. On Goal 1 consisting of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, the report contends that despite the ongoing economic and financial crisis in Europe and North America which resulted in slower growth globally, the current trends suggest that the momentum of growth in the developing world remains strong enough to sustain the progress needed to reach the global poverty-reduction target⁴. However, the report recognizes the disparities between regions and discrepancies at national levels. Indeed, according to the Global

“... there is a lot of progress in Ghana in certain parts of the country in reducing poverty and improving living standards, but there are other parts of Ghana where there is still a tremendous amount of poverty and a great amount to do, like in the north in particular”.

Poverty report issued by the African Development Bank in collaboration with the World Bank,

“Of the developing regions, Sub-Saharan Africa faces the greatest challenge of meeting the MDGs”⁵.

It further recognizes the challenges posed by the friability and reliability of the data on which the report is based. It highlights the situation countries where the data may be unavailable, inaccessible or inaccurate. In this regard, the report states that the gaps remain particularly problematic in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the data necessary to make comparisons over the full range of MDGs are available in less than half the countries.

Taken individually, country reports present different realities in regions and/or urban versus urban areas. Commenting on the MDGs achievement progress in Ghana, Jeffrey Sachs, the former director of the United Nations Millenium project, shows some satisfaction but keeps a certain reserve and recognizes the challenges to be addressed for effective achievement of the MDGs. He remarks that

“because of good governance, Ghana is likely to reach all of the Millenium Development Goals toward ending extreme poverty and child mortality”.

However, he goes on to say that

“... there is a lot of progress in Ghana in certain parts of the country in reducing poverty and improving living standards, but there are other parts of Ghana where there is still a tremendous amount of poverty and a great amount to do, like in the north in particular”⁶.

Concerning goal 2 which claims to achieve Universal Primary education by 2015, the 2011 MDGs report affirms that Sub-Saharan Africa has the best record for improvement in primary school enrolment. However, the report recognizes that children from areas affected by armed conflicts are likely not to attain primary education. The trends remains the same on almost or goals with regards Sub-Saharan region.

This leads to the conclusion that although the MDGs have created a global forum to highlight the urgency of addressing the issue of poverty eradication and sustainable development, the MDGs project did not address adequately the issues impacting the conducive environment to stimulate and sustain socioeconomic development.

IMPACT OF POLITICAL STABILITY, PEACE AND SECURITY TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF MDGS

The majority of Sub-Saharan African countries are either experiencing or recovering from armed conflicts. Those currently experiencing internal armed conflicts cannot be expected to achieve any of the MDGs for obvious reasons. Armed conflicts mean that basic infrastructures such as schools, hospitals, water and sanitation and electricity installations, transport and communication facilities are destroyed. These constitute the vehicle and *sine qua non* conditions for economic growth.

Armed conflict and aftermath situation promotes corruption and embezzlement of public funds due to inefficient control mechanisms. This situation is currently experienced in many Sub-Saharan African countries and as long as it prevails we cannot hope of achieving MDGs in those particular countries.

Furthermore, armed conflicts and their aftermath entail a climate of insecurity and a high rate of violence and criminality due to easy traffic of weapons. It also means fragile or broken down judiciary systems and security structures unable to restore peace and order in the country. Such a situation lowers productivity of local people and hinders foreign investments.

Moreover, armed conflict and aftermath situation promotes corruption and embezzlement of public funds

due to inefficient control mechanisms. This situation is currently experienced in many Sub-Saharan African countries and as long as it prevails we cannot hope of achieving MDGs in those particular countries.

GOOD GOVERNANCE, DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Some of the countries who have escaped the scourge of armed conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa are faced with political quagmire stemming from lack of democratic succession from one leader to the next through democratic, free and fair elections. We have witnessed more than three countries in a period of five years where the president changes the constitution which initially limited the terms of presidency so as to remain on power. In other cases, the power passes from father to son in a typical hereditary system. Lack of democratic regimes leads to suppression of individual rights and fundamental freedoms indispensable for sustainable development.

Furthermore, lack of democracy has led many countries to experience imbalances in economic development between regions and/or groups of people. This affects significantly the level of achievement of the MDGs at national level although the statistics may show an overall positive progress.

EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES

The critical paradox as far as achieving the MDGs in Sub-Saharan Africa is concerned is the issue of exploitation of natural resources. The majority of the countries in possession of the most valuable resources on the global market such as oil,

The current financial and economic crises affecting developed countries will affect seriously the developing countries in various ways impacting the achievement of the MDGs. On one hand, the commitment of the developed countries to provide required funding of the MDGs as stated in Goal 8 is likely not to be fulfilled. On the other hand, as their economies shrink, their imports of raw materials and other products originating from Sub-Saharan Africa will drop and/or the prices of these products will drop dramatically.

gold, diamonds, uranium, timber, etc, are ranked lowest on the list of countries on track to achieve the MDGs. The causes of this situation are at the same internal and external. The multinationals have become superpowers which decide and change as they please the regimes to rule those countries rich in natural resources. In those countries, the achievement of MDGs depends largely on effective leadership for which multinationals retain the last word. How to address that for the sake of the populations held ransom remains a puzzle.

REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND COOPERATION

Economic growth is mere impossible when countries in the region close their doors to each other. Regional blocks have emerged with a hope of developing into a one regional block promoting free movement of people and goods. However, the process of opening the markets and allowing free movement of people and goods across borders are still a handicap in some regional blocks. Furthermore, most countries in Sub-Saharan countries are landlocked and their access to the sea for cheaper imports and easy access to outside markets through sea routes are indispensable for economic growth required for the achievement of the MDGs.

DEVELOPMENT AND EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT OF HUMAN CAPITAL

Economic growth relies heavily on using modern technology and skilled human resources to compete on the international markets. Sub-Saharan has been severely hit by an ever increasing brain drain of most skilled and young people who migrate to developed countries for greener pastures and better opportunities. At

the same time the region is in a serious shortage of skilled personnel in various domains of production of goods and services. This hinders the achievement of the MDGs, especially those related to health and those to do with education. Until this problem is addressed it will be difficult to achieve the MDGs in most affected countries.

THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

Lastly but not least, the current financial and economic crises affecting developed countries will affect seriously the developing countries in various ways impacting the achievement of the MDGs. On one hand, the commitment of the developed countries to provide required funding of the MDGs as stated in Goal 8 is likely not to be fulfilled. On the other hand, as their economies shrink, their imports of raw materials and other products originating from Sub-Saharan Africa will drop and/or the prices of these products will drop dramatically. The result of such a situation would be disastrous and would erode the progress already made towards the achievement of the MDGs.

WAY FORWARD

Considering the above highlighted challenges already visible or foreseeable in the near future, the World leaders need to seat and consider how to address them. In particular, there is need to review and adjust the MDGs taking into account the current geopolitical and economic situations prevailing in different regions and their impact globally and locally. In this regard, the problem of peace and security, terrorist activities and their effects on global and local economies have to be addressed adequately.

Furthermore, the required transparency and accountability at national level should be applied and strengthened on trade and financial transactions at global level. In particular, the exploitation of

Good governance and respect of human rights have to be enforced across the region.

natural resources in developing countries has to be monitored and rendered as transparent as possible so that they profit to the maximum the populations of the countries in which they are extracted.

Moreover, the economic growth required for achieving the MDGs has to be pro-poor oriented in order to involve the majority of the population in the production process so as to create a wide purchase capacity. To achieve this, the problem of brain drain has to be addressed so that countries can retain the skills which are required for entrepreneurship and to create employment indispensable for a dynamic and sustained development.

Finally but not least, the issues of democracy, good governance and respect of human rights have to be enforced across the region.

CONCLUSION

This article has recognized the importance of the MDGs which is mainly to bring the problem of poverty eradication and sustainable development to the global agenda. It further recognized that the last decade has seen an overall progress towards the MDGs. However, it stressed the problem of imbalances and disparities observed between regions, between countries within the region and between areas within a country. It focused on specific challenges faced by the Sub-Saharan countries in their attempt to achieve the MDGs. It reiterates the global call to address these challenges if the MDGs have to be achieved as scheduled. It provides some recommendations on what needs to be done for the achievement and more importantly the sustainability of the MDGs.

NOTES

1 MDGs Report 2011.

2 Ban Ki-Moon, MDGs Report, United Nations, 2011, foreward, p.3.

3 Ibid, p.3.

4 MDGs Report 2011.

5 Global Poverty Report, *Achieving the Millenium Development Goals in Africa: Progress, Prospects, and Policy Implications*, African Development Bank, June 2002, p.10.

6 Jeffrey Scha in *The Christian Science Monitor*, January 11, 2012.

