

GUARE

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDG) AND THE POST 2015 AGENDA

DISCUSSION POINTS

GLOBAL CONSENSUS WITHOUT STRONG GLOBAL WILLINGNESS

• The 2000 declaration set a clear roadmap to reducing poverty; promoting education for all children, girls and boys; promoting gender equality and empowering women; saving children by reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases; and protecting the environment; and developing global for development.

• More than a set of slogans, the goals are a result of a global consensus by world leaders what is expected of the world in terms taking billions of people out of poverty, illiteracy, and free from diseases.

• Progress has been slow and uneven. As the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon put it, “progress tends to bypass those who are lowest on the economic ladder or are otherwise disadvantaged because of their sex, age, disability, or ethnicity. Disparities between urban and rural areas remain daunting”.

• Three main reasons could explain the slowness and the uneven nature of the progress towards meeting the MDGs:

First, the unfulfilled commitments by Donor Government in delivering on their promises regarding the Official Development Assistance (ODA). In 2010, Donor Governments committed to support

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Africa with USD 64 Billion; but only 46 billions were delivered to the continent, leaving a gap of 18 billions USD’.

Second, the unfulfilled commitments by developing countries who failed to allocate important portions of their budget for key MDG sectors such as health, education, and pro-poor economic measures. In addition, there are serious internal barriers to trade and lack of sufficient reforms that could otherwise boost economic development and poverty eradication. Finally, developing countries did not address the unequal distribution of wealth, and the gaps between the poor and the rich continued to wide all these years.

Third, the MDG discourse was not accompanied by a clear debate on structural causes of poverty in developing countries.

WHAT CAN BE CELEBRATED ON THE ACHIEVEMENTS?

There are four areas where the world has done significant progress towards achieving MDGs².

• Promoting gender equality and empowering women: 70 percent of developing countries (89 countries) are on target of gender parity in primary education; and 68 percent are on target towards eliminating gender disparity in secondary education.

Low Income countries such as Bangladesh, Malawi, The Gambia, Mauritania and Rwanda made it.

Challenges to retain girls in school: Quality education remain a challenge, although there are as many girls and boys in the classrooms. Retention of girls enrolled in schools requires that governments address other factors such as child marriage, domestic child labour, and poverty that

DEVELOPMENT ECONOMIST; SOCIOLOGIST AND HUMAN RIGHTS EXPERT

forces girls to join their mothers in finding food for the rest of the family. This puts serious burden on girls ‘education.

• *Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger:* 55 percent of developing countries are on targeting of reducing by half, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$ 1.25 a day. Low-Income Countries who are likely to make it by 2015 are Cambodia, Central Africa Republic, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya and Mauritania.

In addition 45% of countries (25) are on target of reducing by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

Fighting poverty is mainly a political will to invest in people, and make the best use of available assets. Low-income countries who diversifies sources of their income, promote services, exploit untapped resources in the agricultural sector are likely to create millions of jobs for poor people, reduce the price of goods in urban centres, and feed their own people. This is why countries such as Kenya on this list. Kenya relies mainly on tourism and agriculture, while other natural rich countries such as Angola or Democratic Republic of Congo over rely on minerals and oil while neglecting huge potential they have in agriculture. As a result, nearly everything people eat in DR Congo and Angola is imported from abroad. The fight against poverty becomes a mere slogan. Job creating then becomes only a mere dream as no enabling environment is created to unlock the potential of young people and to promote micro-enterprise. Post-colonial dreams of feeding the people first, have disappeared from the minds of people of African leaders. It has replaced by serious military-led corruption. While China is making progress in reducing poverty level at home, many Low Income Countries depending on Chinese investments are likely to continue lagging behind for lack of effective vision and clear commitments.

- **Ensuring environmental sustainability:** 50 percent of countries – 66 countries- are on track for one of the four expected results of this goal. That is the progress towards improving access to safe drinking water. Low income countries such as Benin, Burkina Faso (landlocked country), Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Nepal, etc.

However, little is done to prevent the continuous destruction of the environment. Poor countries with weak industrial basis are equally affected by climate change. Green energy is the way forward for all. This is where international solidarity is urgently needed to prevent destruction of forests and water, at the same time ensuring that populations from low income countries have access to affordable food, housing and renewed source of energy.

Countries with large portion of forests such as the ones in the Congo Bassin are also countries which have very weak legal framework and policies to protect such forests, and reduce biodiversity loss.

- **Achieving Universal Primary Education:** 49 percent of developing countries (55 countries) are on target. Low income countries such as Myanmar, Tajikistan and Tanzania, are on target of ensuring that by 2015, children, girls and boys, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

It is a shame that education for all is a sector where less than 50% of countries are on target. This is a disaster as there is alternative to education, in particular basic education. Although Overseas Development Assistance as almost doubled since 2002, reaching a high of \$ 10.8 billion in 2007 according to the World Bank, the quality of education does not always follow. Where did the investments go to? Data from the Bank suggests a “disconnect between spending and the quality of education. The example cited is that of *India where even though most children of primary – school age were enrolled in school, 35 percent of them could not read a simple paragraph and 41 percent could not do a simple subtraction*”. There is therefore need for quality spending: building more schools? Raising teachers’ salaries? Improving the quality of teachers’ training?

- **World governments failed to make progress on saving lives:** progress has been very slow,

and there is little the world can show in terms of *reducing child mortality and improving maternal health*. The scandal is that only 26 and 24 % of countries approaching the agreed targets on reducing child mortality and ensuring that women don’t die when giving life. One of the reasons why progress has been slow is that investments made in these areas did not benefit the large majority of children and women from poor and disadvantaged communities. The world cannot achieve MDG if the most marginalised are not at the centres of national policies and strategies. So far, the MDG agenda has been agenda without equity consideration. Countries adopting and implementing healthcare strategies aiming at delivering services to children below five years of age, and to pregnant women living in rural areas are likely to achieve MDG with equity the bulk of the poor children and women are the main beneficiaries of such strategies.

POST 2015 AGENDA

The post 2015 agenda should be guided by investments in triggers of economic development and social justice:

a) Human rights and rule of law: investing in human rights and promoting rule of law creates a strong foundation for poverty eradication. Where there is no rule of law, the poor are at the mercy of the rich and the almighty. Effective governance creates conducive environment for businesses to flourish, job creation, zero tolerance policies against corruption and mismanagement of funds, that could be allocated health and education sectors for instance, etc. It is not acceptable for Western Government to fund the fight against malaria in a country where national leaders earn huge salaries, but cannot pay their medical doctors and nurses as the money is being used mostly for personal use of those in power. If this is the context, Overseas Development Assistance will not change anything, and gains made so far on MDG could start taking an opposite direction. The respect for human rights and rule of law related reforms should remain a key condition for development cooperation.

b) Education: there is no alternative to education, but investments should put an emphasis on quality education. It will be a dream to achieve

MDGs if in some countries more than 40% of adults cannot read and write. Evidence from a couple of countries such as Mauritius indicates that investing in human capital (quality and quantity) could trigger development in the rest of the sectors. Basic education is crucial but not sufficient to support sustainable development and economic growth. Through the promotion of entrepreneurship development, innovation, research and development, low income countries will be able to do the minimum: transform their raw materials, diversify the basis of their income, and expand their fiscal space in order to improve the quality of lives of their people. Development cooperation agenda should strengthen linkages between universities and research centres to make education a real trigger for development.

c) Information and Communication Technologies (ICT): The power of new technologies, in particular in the area of information and communication is immense, and the potential is not yet fully tapped to boost economic development and create wealth. A post MDG era should continue to use ICT as a trigger for prosperity and job creation in different spheres of life. The first 10 years of MDG campaign did not reduce the digital gap; how could we fight poverty today without addressing the digital divide as if we were at the beginning of 19th century! Lives can be saved today for million if the health sector for instance use sufficient ICT for urban but also rural – based populations.

d) Sustained economic growth: Wealth creation and social justice should continue to dominate the post 2015 agenda. MDG targets require resources; and these resources need to be generated. This is where I share the views of MDG critics such as Erik Reinert who states that MDG creates a ‘palliative economics. The MGD approach, he argues, lies in the emphasis on foreign financing of domestic social and redistribution policies, rather than on domestic financing by the developing countries themselves³. With the international financial crisis, the international community needs renewed commitments and creativity

to support economic growth. This requires serious reform agenda to addressing “the real causes of poverty instead of concentrating on attacking the symptoms...”⁴. Development cooperation agenda should pursue the dialogue with developing countries on the need to create a conducive environment that attracts national and foreign investments in the countries. Family planning should also be an issue to address in line of poverty eradication. With 7 billion human beings, there is an increased pressure on resources such as water, food, land, etc. Developing countries with fast growing population without a fast growing economy cannot dream of getting out of poverty. This aspect should be included in the development cooperation agenda in the post MDG era.

e) International cooperation for global concerns: There are global concerns that require more commitments and concrete actions for all: protection of environment and fair trade including the continued subsidies in the agriculture sector in the USA and in Europe. The world continues to fail to agree on effective ways of reducing biodiversity loss. In addition, there is an urgent need for the subsidy issue to be addressed if the world is serious about addressing poverty and promoting fair trade. As Reinert (2008) put it “ the paradox is that the most effective agriculture in the world, in the USA and Europe, is unable to survive without subsidies and protection. Every Swiss cow is in fact subsidized with four times the pro-capita income in sub-Saharan Africa”⁵. How can developing countries expect to become rich when they export food produce at higher cost to western markets, where they have to compete with European farmers whose produce are subsidized? The often strong call for international solidarity should be translated into concrete actions to address this issue. The current system transforms developing countries into markets for cheap products of American or European farmers. Farmers in developing countries have no subsidies and cannot even compete in their own markets, therefore they will always remain poor.

NOTES

1 www.un.org/esa/policy/mdggap/ Factsheet Where are the gaps? P.1

2 World Bank, Global Monitoring Report 2011 www.worldbank.org/wbs/external/extdec/extglobalmonitor

3 Reinert, Erik, How rich countries got rich and Why poor countries stay poor. New York, Public Affairs, 2008. P240

4 Reinert, Erik, *ibidem*
5 Reinert, Erik, How rich countries got rich and why poor countries stay poor. New York, Public Affairs, 2008. P 150