An MDG-plus Agenda for Africa

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Abstract The MDGs have given African governments the incentive to implement poverty reduction strategies. They have galvanised and focused the development agenda, local governments, and donor countries. However, Africa as a continent faces the substantial challenge of both high poverty levels, and political instability. This article argues that an MDG-plus agenda for Africa needs to take account of local and regional dimensions, as well as international dimensions. In addition, African countries need to learn from other parts of the world; both other regions in the South and countries in the North. As well as promoting a 'bottom-up' approach in general, we should seek and encourage greater public involvement.

1 Introduction

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have given African governments the incentive to implement poverty reduction strategies. The Fifth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union in Sirte, Libya in July 2005 adopted a common position on the review of the MDGs and the Millennium Declaration.

The African Union (AU), the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) all emphasise the achievement of the MDGs.

The AU Commission has been mandated, in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), AfDB, NEPAD and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to monitor the implementation of the MDGs, and reflections are expected to be presented at annual AU Assembly meetings. Furthermore, at the G8 Summit on 11 September 2007, the UN Secretary-General established the MDG Africa Steering and working groups, to support the implementation of commitments toward achieving the MDGs.

2 MDG impacts in Africa

The MDG Targets have galvanised developing countries into action and in general, countries have improved and increased monitoring processes aimed at meeting the MDGs. While making governments more focused, the MDGs have also given weight to, and led to positive responses in the implementation of poverty reduction strategies.

Roberts (2005: 281) sums up the MDGs as having contributed to 'strengthening their [countries] resolve and commitment to persevere with policies and expenditure systems conducive to poverty reduction'. Furthermore, they have given an impetus to a more acceptable universal definition of 'development', as human development.

African governments have managed to develop standardised responses in evaluating effectiveness of their MDG development strategies and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Important linkages between environmental concerns and their effect on good governance have played an important role to date in forging common ground. As Eggen and Bezemer (2008: 1) note, the MDGs and the PRSPs together form the 'international consensus on means and ends of "development" in our time'.

However, the challenge to Africa is greater than anywhere else in the world. While Africa as a continent still faces the dual challenges of high poverty levels and political instability (Nhema 2004), there have been improvements in both the economic and political environments over the last decade (Nhema and Zeleza 2007). These developments are crucial preconditions for achieving the MDGs. There is therefore a need to maintain this impetus, if Africa's aspirations

to meet some of the MDG goals are to be achieved in the future.

In light of this, there is a need to combine the MDGs with local initiatives that take into account realistic measures and Indicators that are based upon national economic, political and social dictates. To wit, any initiatives that are not home-grown and do not have the input of the people they are designed to serve are bound to be met with mixed reactions by the intended beneficiaries and stakeholders.

3 An MDG-plus agenda

In terms of an 'MDG-plus' agenda, from now to 2015 as well as after 2015, it would be ideal to combine the current MDGs with more locally defined specific measures and Indicators. Universal Indicators will continue to be important but only if they are strengthened by inputs from locally defined measures. With regard to global Targets and Goals, 'the focus should also be heavily on tailoring those to the national context and localise them' (see Vandemoortele, this *IDS Bulletin*).

Timelines are important and should be maintained and supported by concrete international monitoring and evaluation measures (see Jahan, this *IDS Bulletin*). Implementing countries should also be encouraged to put a strong emphasis on the creation of sound economic, political and social environments that provide a strong foundation for the attainment of MDGs. Such an approach will entail holistically addressing the issues of inequality, poverty, social justice, basic human rights, wellbeing and the welfare of citizens.

Countries in Africa can learn from the experiences of other regions in the South and indeed the North. To start with, there is a need to explore the appropriate policy framework and conditions conducive to democratic governance and sustainable development at the economic, social and cultural levels based on the realities on the continent.

In sum, an 'MDG-plus' agenda for Africa must have four key components. First, it should take into account local, regional and international dimensions. Second, it should entail African countries learning from other parts of the world. Third it should promote a 'bottom-up' approach. Finally, it should seek and encourage greater public involvement.

References

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