Beyond the Millennium Development Goals:

What can Africa expect?

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As the world is preparing for a post-Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) era, reflecting on what has been achieved in the development discourse is critical. While the world has managed to change significantly since the MDGs were endorsed, there are a number of complexities that have also emerged. While these have been salient all the time, they have since become prominent, the most notable one being the different levels on which countries have managed to achieve the MDGs. Although Africa has been part of the MDGs agenda, the continent has not achieved most of the MDGs. It still lags behind in many areas. These include, among others, poverty reduction and hunger. One of the reasons for this situation has been Africa's dependency on donor funding in implementing programmes that are linked to MDGs. After 2015, Africa expects a more inclusive framework that will emphasise economic, technological, social and environmental support in order to deal successfully with the complex realities of poverty, inequality, climate change and sustainable consumption of resources. In addition, a holistic approach that merges the MDGs with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be more effective for Africa.

Introduction

Since their endorsement in 2000, the MDGs have been a pillar and point of reference for sustainable development. Because of this, in the past years there has been public advocacy in their support.[1] MDGs have been incorporated into the world's development agenda as long-term objectives to achieve a number of national development plans and poverty-reduction strategies. They have been embedded in several international and regional initiatives and have had an influence on policy discourse not only in Africa, but throughout the developing world.[2] The MDGs consist of 8 goals, 18 targets, and 48 indicators, and they were the result of a series of consultations, world summits, and international conferences on children, women, education, population, food security, the environment, and human settlements, sponsored by the United Nations (UN) in the mid-1990s.[3]

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With the 2015 deadline approaching, there is a hive of activity in various contexts to try to come up with development goals beyond 2015. A number of cross-cutting issues, such as climate change, sustainable development, eradication of poverty, maintenance of environmental sustainability and managing equitable distribution of natural resources, have become topical.[4] Various initiatives are under way in discussing and offering proposals for the post-2015 framework. It is important to note that while there are expectations, this is a complex process in which it would be difficult to reach an agreement that will satisfy the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable countries. Despite this, Africa expects to play an important role in the post-2015 agenda so as to ensure that there will be no one-size-fits-all approach to the development agenda that will replace the MDGs.

As the period of their existence is coming to an end in 2015, one wonders what the world is going to be like after the MDGs. The overview of the impacts and achievements of the MDGs gives a mixed picture.[5] Some countries and regions have done better than others, with some goals achieved, others partially achieved and others not achieved at all, and in view of the current economic crisis and environmental disasters, shrinkage of resource flows from the developed to the developing world is imminent. This will make it difficult for those countries that are lagging behind in obtaining resources to help them to achieve some of the MDGs. There is a high likelihood that these will be among the developing countries, including Africa.

The question that appears to trouble these countries is: 'What will replace the MDGs?' In analysing this question, this brief evaluates Africa's vulnerability to the shrinkage of resources that had been allocated for development through a grand world strategy such as the MDGs. In the post-2015 development agenda, Africa expects to play a critical role in areas such as agriculture, which has the potential to reduce poverty and hunger.

The evolution of the MDGs

The MDGs evolved as an urgent need to address poverty around the world. They were the fruit of a long effort to build consensus around set targets for reducing poverty.[6] They were the culmination of a protracted process that stretched back to the 1990 World Development Report, which proposed a target for halving poverty in the world.

They brought together a diverse range of international role players to agree on a common platform for priorities to address poverty, hunger, joblessness, diseases, lack of shelter, gender inequality, and environmental decline.[7] During the Millennium Declaration, 189 governments described the world's central challenge as ensuring that globalisation becomes a positive force for all the world's people, and made a commitment to freeing the entire human race from want.[8] Following the declaration, the MDGs were finalised in 2002, with a deadline of 2015 being set for delivery. These were measurable targets attached to a time frame for making a difference in the lives of billions of people in the world.[9]

Governments in developing and developed countries jointly committed themselves to providing the resources and the policies to implement these goals. Between 1990 and 2002, the world made significant progress towards achieving most MDGs. For instance, the average incomes of most countries went up by 21 per cent; the number of people living in extreme poverty declined by 130 million; life expectancy rose from 63 years to 65 years; and primary school enrolments and access to safe drinking water and sanitation increased significantly. While progress varied across regions, between countries and within countries, these achievements reflect the fact that the MDGs managed to steer the world towards what can be referred to as the universal development of the world.

Juxtaposing sustainable development and MDGs

Following the outcome of the 2010 high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly on the MDGs, the UN Secretary-General established the UN Task Team in September 2011 to support the UN's system-wide preparations for the post-2015 UN development agenda, in consultation with various stakeholders. On the other hand, sustainable development has been the mandate of the UN system since the 1992 Rio Summit. In view of the MDGs and the philosophy of sustainable development, it can be said that a realistic development agenda that will have a meaningful impact on the world's development can no longer neglect the link between the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of development.[10] It has already been stated that long-term development and a viable post-2015 development agenda need integrated policy making in which social equity, economic growth, and environmental protection are approached concurrently.

The MDGs came after the philosophy of

sustainable development. The debate and the use of the term *sustainable development* started in June 1972, during the Conference on the Human Environment held in the Swedish capital, Stockholm.[11] The concept was later used by the Geneva World Council of Churches as it battled with the issues of environmental concerns, poverty, and deprivation.[12] The term continued to be used by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) in the 1980s.

As structures to deal with the environment began to be created in mainstream debates, the IUCN, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) in a joint initiative put together the World Conservation Strategy (WCS), which placed ecological conditions at the core of sustainable development, as well as the utilisation of ecosystems and resources.[13] The WCS had three basic principles: sustainable resource use, maintenance of biodiversity and the preservation of ecosystems as important pillars of sustainable development.

In 1982, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) was formed by the UN General Assembly in order to present a world focus on the environment, economic growth, and developmental issues.[14] As worldwide efforts became more concerted in merging the environmental and developmental needs, the WCED published the 1987 Brundtland Report, *Our common future*, by Gro Harlem Brundtland, who was the Minister of State of the Kingdom of Norway between 1981 and 1986.[15] This report popularised the term 'sustainable development', which was adopted as meaning 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

In an attempt to further define the concept,[16] scholars and practitioners have articulated and promoted their own definitions, resulting in more than 300 definitions.[17] As a result of multiple definitions, multiple interpretations, key goals, indicators, values and practices have been developed over time. The various approaches to sustainable development cause problems in quantifying and measuring progress.[18]

The hype about sustainable development took centre stage during 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio, Brazil. A number of proposals were made through the Rio Declaration and the Earth Charter. The Rio Declaration established rights and obligations of nations in the pursuit

of sustainable development. The main focus was on meeting essential needs for jobs, food, energy, water and sanitation; ensuring a sustainable level of population; conserving and enhancing the resource base; and reviewing technology in an endeavour to ensure that the environment and economic growth were integrated in decision making and policy making. Sustainable development was to be attained by the creation of key instruments and frameworks.

The Rio Declaration articulated five proposals and a set of 27 principles on the environment and the development agenda.[19] Agenda 21 was the blueprint for sustainable development, which was a plan of action to be implemented globally, nationally, and locally with a wide range of other actors. Agenda 21 encapsulated a global plan of action to address environmental and developmental needs, which included the forest principles – a non-binding statement of 15 principles for the sustainable management of forests – the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention to Combat Desertification, and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).[20] With such a framework and structures, the world leaders were much more focused on creating an environment where sustainable development could be achieved on a world scale. In other words, an attempt was made to incorporate the tensions between economic growth, poverty alleviation, and environmental concerns including climate change, loss of biodiversity, water scarcity, and energy security. This was a concerted effort to meet basic human needs as well as sustaining the environment, with equity as the guiding principle. To ensure that sustainable development remained central, the Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD) was created in December of 1992 in order to implement the Rio Earth Summit agreements and declarations.[21]

The world moved on in pursuit of sustainable development as a goal, leading to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1992, which called again on the world leaders to make a commitment to sustainable development. This meeting was attended by governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society, environmental organisations, and the academic community. It led to the Johannesburg Plan of Action, which resulted in the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development and the plan of action for the WSSD. The Johannesburg summit identified poverty eradication, changing unsustainable patterns of

consumption and production, and managing the environment as core to sustainable development.[22]

Thus, issues of economic development, poverty alleviation, climate change and loss of biodiversity, water scarcity, and energy security have set in motion movements for social justice on a global scale. Although environmental issues, inequality, poverty eradication and popular participation remain major challenges at the national, regional and international level, a number of frameworks and laws have been passed in order to integrate environmental and development issues into human development agenda. Under the MDGs, environmental sustainability is addressed by goal number 7: 'Ensure environmental sustainability by 2015'.

Important to note is that the world community should be cautious not to repeat the mistake of presenting sustainable development as an environmental issue. Future development agenda should attempt to strike a balance that seeks to integrate economic, social, and environmental dimensions so as to promote a more holistic approach to a post-2015 agenda.[23]

During the preparatory process for Rio+20, eight priority areas were highlighted for SDGs: sustainable consumption and production patterns; food security and sustainable agriculture; sustainable energy for all; water access and efficiency; oceans; sustainable cities; green jobs, decent work, and social inclusion; and disaster risk reduction and resilience.[24] Apart from these, a report on the UN Secretary-General's high-level Panel on Global Sustainability also suggests climate change and biodiversity as additional issues. Of these areas, sustainable energy for all has attracted much attention.[25]

Of notable significance is that at the moment two parallel processes exist, the one that discusses and evaluates gains made through a philosophy of SDGs and MDGs, and the one that looks at post-2015 development agenda. What is emerging is that member states are calling for a single process and proper coordination of an outcome representing both the SDGs and a post-2015 development agenda.[26]

Africa's contribution

Through South Africa's hosting of two events of international importance: WSSD in 2002 and the 17th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP 17) in 2011, it can be said that Africa has managed to place itself on the global stage regarding sustainable development.

The WSSD resulted in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI), which put much emphasis on the need to implement different agreements reached during the international summits. The COP-17 provided the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (DPEA) and the Green Climate Fund (GCF). The DPEA was adopted as a guide to provide insights on mitigation and adaptation of climate change, capacity building and many other components that could impact on the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The GCF, on the other hand, promotes financial mechanisms to support project development in developing nations to mitigate climate change. All these important agreements were notably reached on African soil.

What has Africa achieved through MDGs and sustainable development debates?

The development debate has remained donor oriented, although with a shift to debates about the role of the emerging economies such as the Group of 77 (G77), multilateral organisations like BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), and the need to reform international financial institutions. Generally, efforts to achieve MDG-based targets have improved the lives of people in Africa. In spite of the series of food, energy, financial and economic shocks, Africa has benefited substantially from the MDGs advocacy, as well as the sustainable development debates. A number of the MDG goals have been incorporated into national development plans and strategies of most African countries, and the MDG progress and gaps monitoring has forced these countries to continue to allocate resources towards the achievement of MDGs.[27] As a result of this, some of the poorest countries in Africa have made greater strides in areas such as education and health.[28] For example, in Ethiopia and Tanzania, primary school enrolment rates have doubled. Malawi and Algeria have become food exporters. Rates of HIV infection have fallen significantly in Sub-Saharan Africa, while reported malaria cases have been halved in countries like Rwanda and Zambia.[29]

While these achievements have been attained through MDGs, loopholes still exist with regard to the implementation of the programmes, as well as the capacity to monitor and evaluate the impact of MDGs in general.[30] Poverty has remained a major challenge in Africa, with progress in this area confined mainly to East Asia, especially China.[31] In China and India, the number of people that have emerged from poverty has been estimated at

455 million. Predictions indicate that the number of poor people in these countries will drop to 900 million by 2015.[32] In addition to poverty, maternal mortality is a key development challenge, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa.[33] What compounds these challenges is the fact that pledges to double aid to Africa by 2010 did not materialise.[34]

Because of this, it has been argued that in some African countries the MDGs did not serve the strategic purpose of changing the discourse on development, as they were donor led.[35] A major criticism of the MDGs is that they missed out on crucial dimensions of development such as human rights, good governance and security. In most countries, civil society has been excluded from the planning and formulation of development strategies. There has been a major failure to integrate the private sector and civil society as crucial development actors,[36] an issue which the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, discussed below, has sought to address.

The evolution of the new agenda

There seems to be a more comprehensive and holistic approach to ensuring inclusivity in setting the post-2015 agenda. The aim is to put together a more comprehensive framework that captures the context and the complex problems and challenges the world faces. Debate on the successor to the MDGs began in 2011 and has largely been influenced by international activities emanating from important multilateral high-level meetings that are now seeking to achieve a maximum nexus of a post-MDG agenda and sustainable development. Many achievements have come through the following agreements:

a) **The Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation:** The Busan document is the culmination of the 4th High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, held in Busan, the Republic of Korea, from 29 November to 1 December 2011. It was the result of a year-long process of consultations that included governments, civil society, private sectors, and many other actors. The Busan Partnership document sets out principles, commitments, and actions setting the foundation for effective cooperation, endorsed by ministers of developed and developing nations, emerging economies, providers of South-South and triangular cooperation, and civil society. While the Busan document is not a binding document, it is a statement of intent by a wide range of stakeholders to enhance

the effectiveness of international development cooperation, which is critical for any post-2015 agenda. The document predicates the success of fighting poverty, inequality and hunger by ensuring joint efforts and investments to address the challenges of health, climate change, economic downturns, food and fuel price crises, conflict and fragility, and vulnerability to shocks and natural disasters.[37] The document recognises the multiple sources of development cooperation and the numerous roles played by state and non-state actors, as well as cooperation between countries at different stages in their development, including middle-income countries. It also takes into consideration new forms of public-private partnership that have become prominent and therefore complement North-South cooperation.

b) **The New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States:** The New Deal for Engagement of Fragile States is a testament to the realistic approach to setting the post-2015 framework. The new deal was reached by the G7 group and 19 conflict-affected countries, development partners and international organisations. The new deal sets out peace-building and state-building goals (PSGs), with a focus on country-led and country-owned transitions out of fragility.[38] The central focus of the new deal is also on building trust and providing aid and resources more effectively, and the recognition that building peaceful states requires dialogue and is a long-term effort that requires incremental efforts.[39] Experience had shown that most of the countries faced with fragility and conflict had been left out in the achievement of some of the MDGs. Of the 42 countries at the bottom of the Human Development Index (HDI), 29 are fragile states, and these are the countries that will be left behind in the development process. The New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States seems to emphasise the need to look at the causes of poverty rather than addressing just the symptoms, and thereby trying to integrate a framework that speaks to the concerns of conflict-affected and fragile states. The new deal was not designed by donors alone, but also by various conflict-affected and fragile states themselves. An equitable system and sustainable peace depends on donors, partner governments, and affected communities working together to set the common goals and targets for a post-2015 framework. Fragile states are in a large part off track in meeting

the MDGs, and achieving these goals depends on the collective understanding of the unique challenges of fragile states.

c) **Outcomes of COP 17 in Durban and COP 18 in Doha**: While no significant binding agreement was reached at either COP 17 in Durban or COP 18 in Doha, the world seems to be putting together the building blocks and the mechanisms to ensure that a climate-change binding agreement will come into effect in 2020. The outcomes of COP 17 in Durban in 2011 allowed the world community to move on three important issues: the building of an action plan to scale up mitigation and adaptation; the full implementation of commitments to mitigation targets and actions (both in the context of the Convention and the Kyoto Protocol); and moving towards the post-2020 future by maintaining the goal of staying below two degrees of global warming and by putting in place by 2015 a multilateral rules-based system applicable to all parties from 2020 onwards.[40] However, the key outcome of the COP 18 climate talks in Doha in 2012 was that the 'loss and damage mechanism' made a significant move towards compensating poor nations for losses due to climate change. Furthermore the Kyoto Protocol, the only existing binding agreement under which developed countries would commit to cutting GHG emissions, was amended so that it continued into the second commitment period of eight years. The final text also encouraged rich nations to mobilise at least US$ 10 billion a year up to 2020, a timetable for the 2015 global climate change agreement and increasing ambition by 2020. A series of meetings will be convened by the UN to ensure that there is enough political will to meet the 2015 deadline.

How critical are the outcomes of Rio+20 in setting the scene for a post-2015 framework?

The outcomes of the Rio+20 contained in the document *The future we want: Our common vision* is a clear enunciation of the problems of sustainable development such as unsustainable patterns of consumption and production. Key to the document are requirements for sustainable development, which have been spelt out as:

i   Promoting equitable and inclusive growth
ii   Creating greater opportunities for all
iii. Reducing inequalities

iv. Raising basic standards of living
v.   Fostering equitable social development and inclusion
vi. Putting in place an integrated and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems that supports economic, social and human development while facilitating ecosystem conservation.

For Africa, attempts have been made to balance these through the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) plan of action, as well as testimony by some African countries that have attempted to deepen the implementation of democracy, human rights, good governance and sound economic management.[41] All these have been monitored through Africa's peer review mechanism.

While in the *Future we want* document the MDGs are underscored as a useful medium for achieving specific development gains as part of a broad development vision and framework, there is a call for their full and timely achievement. There is also a concerted call for the importance and utility of a set of SDGs which are based on Agenda 21 and the JPOI, and fully respect all Rio principles, which take into account different national circumstances, capacities and priorities.[42]

There is an emphasis on SDGs that are concise and easy to communicate. These should be limited in number, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries.[43] Deriving from these calls, issues that should concern Africa the most are economic, social, environmental and peace and security related. As such, a post-2015 development structure should represent a convergence of the SDGs and MDGs.

Conclusion

The political intergovernmental process of preparing the post-2015 period has gained momentum with a series of high-level meetings that seek to make a thorough assessment of what has been achieved and thereby ensure that a comprehensive process puts together a post-2015 agenda. For progress to be made in Africa, Africa needs funding. There are a number of changes that will help Africa to play an important role in the post-2015 agenda. The global economic power is shifting towards emerging market economies such as the BRICS countries. The new development framework needs to consider a new approach to development assistance that looks into the dual roles that can be played by the BRICS, either as donors or

recipients. For Africa, removing structural impediments and eliminating trade barriers, and creating access to markets, good governance, and inclusive participation[44] would ensure ownership of the post-2015 epoch.

Notes

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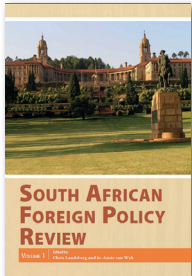
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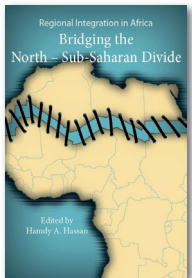Edited by Chris Landsberg and Jo-Ansie van Wyk

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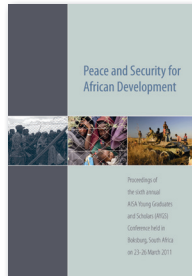
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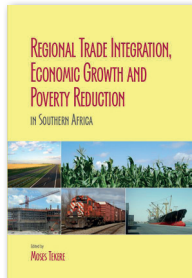ISBN 978-0-7983-0312-5

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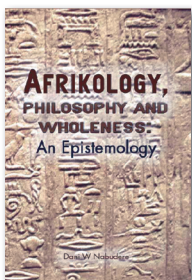Edited by Hamdy A Hassan

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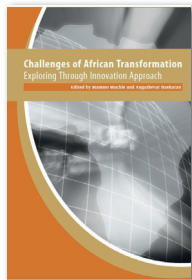
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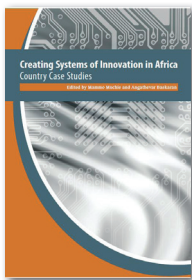
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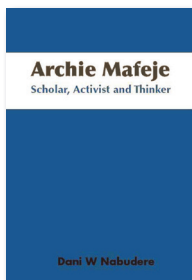Edited by Mammo Muchie and Angathevar Baskaran

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