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The MDGs and Africa: The Elusive Partnership?ⁱ

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THE MDGS: A GLOBAL PACT?

In September 2000, 89 countries met at United Nations (UN) headquarters in New York amid great fanfare to adopt the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs sought to generate international consensus to eliminate international poverty and bring about accelerated development. But are the MDGs a global pact that binds African states into mutual accountability and mutual responsibility arrangements? Unfortunately, the MDGs are just a list of wishes and hopes on international development; while they are path-breaking, they are but a mere promissory note committing states to substantially address the needs of the poor, in particular those residing in developing countries. With only seven years left towards the deadlines set for achieving the MDG targets, time is of the essence. The challenge is to turn the MDGs into a genuine global deal and plan of action - one anchored on the idea of mutual accountability and responsibility.

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AFRICA AND THE MDGS

A conference at the end of March 2007, titled *Accelerating Africa's Growth and Development to meet the MDGs: Emerging Challenges and Way Forward*, came to the conclusion that the continent is at risk of not meeting the MDGs. Africa's record has been inadequate. It is especially the poor in the continent that have been negatively affected. Twenty-three sub-Saharan countries are failing in half or more of the goals, and progress in addressing the challenges of child mortality, basic education, malnutrition, improved water supply, maternal mortality and gender discrimination in primary enrolment, remains very slow.

In addition, the continent will require an average economic growth rate of at least 7% per annum across the board. But this 7% may very well be a very conservative estimate; 10-12% annual growth is more realistic. By 2003 the continent had achieved only an average of 3.5% economic growth. In the 1990's, the growth rate was a low 2,1% for the entire decade. The 2007 growth figures are estimated to be in the region of 5, 8%, still below the target of 7% set by the AU and NEPAD. Only four African states averaged a real GDP growth rate of 7% or more in the period 1998-2006.

Moreover, the continent requires an investment/GDP ratio of between 21 and 46%; that is an average investment ratio of 33%. ECA also estimates that Africa has to reduce poverty by an average of 4% per year in order to attain the international development goal of reducing poverty by 50% by the year 2015.

Former Mozambican president, Joachim Chissano, recently argued that "Africa may not meet the millennium development goals on health". He said that,

“although progress had been made in the health sector, more effort and resources were necessary in the remaining seven years to ensure that the goals...were met”. Some 45 million people worldwide are infected with HIV/AIDS, with about 29,4 million having already died from the disease. Africa and the Caribbean are the two worst affected areas. But the resources from the industrialized powers, and the policy urgency from Africa, needs to come as a matter of urgency.

WAR AND CONFLICT IN AFRICA

The MDGs will not be realised unless war and conflict are addressed in the continent - conflicts continue to threaten global peace and security. NEPAD and the AU live by the political mantra that ‘there can be no peace without development, and no development without peace’, thus making an explicit link between peace and security on the one hand, and the MDGs on the other. Africa has a huge responsibility to address conflicts on the continent; but the Northern powers must live up to their promises to provide resources to bolster the continent's peace support operations capabilities. The ongoing conflict in Darfur needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency, and African actors, in partnership with the UN and others, should invoke ‘the responsibility to protect’ to arrest the conflict there. The gains recently made in the Great Lakes region could be reversed unless the political stability in the DRC and Burundi are consolidated as genuine democracies. It is imperative that the impending crisis in Zimbabwe is brought under control, both through a negotiated political settlement and constitution-making process, as well as an economic recovery programme which should include addressing the land and social injustice questions. In countries like Liberia, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, and Angola real meaning has to be given to the idea of post-violence reconstruction, through democratic governance initiatives, lest war return to these countries.

Achieving the MDGs will depend largely on the extent to which African nations and their industrialised partners can live up to agreements and commitments made

AFRICA, THE MDGS AND GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS

The prospects for achieving the MDGs depend largely on the extent to which African nations and their industrialised partners can live up to agreements and commitments made in the context of partnership agreements. This means, amongst others, that African states should continue to push for the urgent development of an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system. There is a further requirement that we need to comprehensively address: this is the debilitating debt problem of the states in the continent, which now stands close to US\$300 billion. We further need to open up markets for freer and fairer trade with Africa, and the G8 and other

industrialised states need to go beyond the 19 countries in Africa and the global South that received debt relief in the context of the HIPC initiative.

The free and fair trade regime should specifically seek to address the issues of:

- the continent's stagnant and declining export earnings and its export concentration in primary commodities;
- falling terms of trade;
- rising debt service payments; and
- severe balance-of payments problems.

At the end of 2000, Africa's total debt stock was estimated at US\$206 billion, up from US\$77 billion in 1990. Close to 60% of this is owed to bilateral creditors, much of it in non-concessional form, and another 25% is owed to multilateral institutions. A clear benchmark here is that, far from Africa's debt burden declining, it is actually on the increase.

***The aim is to make
Africa more self-reliant***

On average, sub-Saharan countries spend about twice as much to comply with their financial commitments *vis-à-vis* external creditors than they do to comply with their social obligations *vis-à-vis* their populations. To spend more on external debt than on basic social services - when tens of millions of people lack access to basic education, primary health, adequate food and safe drinking water - is unsustainable.

Britain's International Development Secretary, Hillary Benn, also reminds us that in 2005, 15 EU states agreed to reach the target of 0.7% of their Gross National Income in official development assistance by 2015, and the G8 undertook to provide US\$50 billion, with some US\$25 billion going to Africa. The aim is to make Africa more self-reliant. Africa, in return, will collectively take greater responsibility for governance, democratisation, and peace and security. African countries favour such a relationship based on partnership. Given the need for accelerated growth, Africa places a huge stress on strategies for investment in human resources, continental and regional infrastructure, and trade.

Add to this the fact that the continent has also been subject to weak trade performance and has been unable to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) in significant quantities. Today, FDI remains unevenly spread across the continent - Nigeria, Angola, and South Africa account for almost half - and is biased in favour of the extractive industries. Savings in Africa are low - as much as 40% of Africa's savings are held outside the continent. Africa thus needs to increase both public and private savings and reverse capital flight.

The continent should hold Britain, and other players like Norway, to their commitment of bolstering an International Finance Facility (IFF), as a way of

securing the funds needed now from the capital markets, based on the official commitments of the rich countries.

CONCLUSION

Africa needs to learn lessons from the past and remember that the 1990s and 1980s saw a steep decline in the flow of official development assistance. So instead of taking the promises of the North at face value, African states and inter-state bodies should put in place mechanisms to monitor whether the West is living up to its side of the bargain. Without mutual accountability and responsibility between Africa and the industrialized powers, the MDGs will remain a pipe dream.