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AFRICA AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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1. Introduction

The Task Team that compiled the Millennium Project Report to the Secretary General of the United Nations in 2005 was pessimistic about the chances of Africa, especially Sub-Saharan Africa, meeting the targets set out in the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. An examination of each goal demonstrates the following:

The first goal was to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. Indicators were:

– to reduce by half, between 1990 and 2005, the number of people living on less than a dollar a day; and

– to reduce by half, between 1990 and 2005, the number of people who suffer from hunger.

The Report extrapolates that by 2015 the absolute headcount of poor people in Sub-Saharan Africa will have risen from 345 million in 2005 to 431 million in 2015, a net gain of 86 million; and that the GDP per capita will have dropped from $520 USD to $509 USD, a net drop of $11 USD. Finally, the Report suggests that people suffering from undernourishment will have risen from 228 million in 2005 to 255 million in 2015, a net gain of 27 million.

The second goal was to achieve universal primary education. By 2005 North Africa was on track with regard to this goal but while Sub-Saharan Africa had made some progress, it was lagging behind.

Goal number 3 was to promote gender equality and empower women. Indicators of this goal were:

– equal enrolment of girls and boys in primary school;

– equal enrolment of boys and girls in secondary school;

– parity in literacy between young women and men; and

– equal representation of men and women in national parliaments.

While North Africa had either met the first two indicators in 2005 or was on track, Sub-Saharan Africa had made progress but was lagging in both. Both North and Sub-Saharan Africa were lagging in the last two indicators.

Goal number four was to reduce infant mortality. Indicators were:

– to reduce mortality of children under five years by two thirds by 2015; and

– to immunize all children against measles.

North Africa was on track on the first indicator and had met the requirements of the second indicator by 2005. In Sub-Saharan Africa there was no change in both indicators. Child mortality was still very high by 2005 and the number of children immunized against measles was still very low.

The fifth goal was to improve maternal health. The indicator was to reduce maternal mortality by three quarters. By 2005 North Africa had reached moderate maternal mortality while in Sub-Saharan Africa there was still a very high incidence of maternal mortality.

Goal number six was to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. Indicators were:

– to halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015;

– to halt and reverse the spread of malaria by 2015; and

– to halt and reverse the spread of tuberculosis by 2015.

By 2005 HIV/AIDS was stabilizing in Sub Sahara Africa. The incidence of malaria was still very high, and the incidence of tuberculosis was very high and on the increase, most probably because tuberculosis is an opportunistic infection in HIV/AIDS. While there was no data on HIV/AIDS in North Africa, the incidence of malaria was low, and in the case of tuberculosis low and decreasing.

The seventh goal was to ensure environmental sustainability. Indicators were:

– to reduce the loss of forests;

– to halve the proportion of people without improved drinking water in urban areas;

– to halve the proportion of people without improved drinking water in rural areas;

– to halve the proportion of people without sanitation in urban areas;

– to halve the proportion of people without sanitation in rural areas; and

– to improve the live of slum dwellers.

The Task Team Report states that by 2005 North Africa had met the indicators of improving drinking water and improving sanitation in urban areas as well as improving the lives of slum dwellers. The region was lagging in the case of sanitation in rural areas and had made little progress in improving drinking water in rural areas. Sub-Saharan Africa had made no progress in all the indicators. In addition, the position was worse with regard to the loss of forests and improvement in slums.

The eighth goal called for a global partnership in development. One indicator that was traceable in 2005 was that of youth employment. In both North and Sub-Saharan Africa youth unemployment was still very high and there was no change in the position between 1990 and 2005.

2. Explaining the non performance

The observations made above reflect regional tendencies. Besides these tendencies there are variations among states within the same regions. First for a country to perform competently in providing services to its citizens, including achieving the Millennium *Development* Goals, certain preconditions have to exist. These are:

– adequate human capital;
– essential infrastructure; and
– good governance.

A brief analysis of these preconditions will explain why there are variations across countries within the same regions.

2.1. *Human Capital*

A majority of governments in poor countries lack the requisite human capital to discharge their functions competently. For instance poor countries do not have sufficient resources to develop sufficient human capital, and what little they produce often leave their countries of origin in search of better opportunities. Rich countries in Europe, the United Stated and the Middle East attract highly qualified personnel from Sub-Saharan Africa. This leaves government programmes in Africa under the charge of second order personnel who lack both strategies and operational or technical skills to plan and carry out critical programmes. The absence of or insufficient support resources such as basic nutrition, inadequate health services, poor education in sexual and reproductive health, low levels of literacy in the population and a shortage of technical and entrepreneurial skills only exacerbate rather than alleviate the situation.

2.2. *Essential Infrastructure*

Essential infrastructure includes transport services, energy, information and communication technology, water and sanitation, essential resources for farming and a sustainable natural environment. Where these are absent or exist in scarcity potential investors are discouraged since costs rise and consequently prices follow suit. Pitched against poor markets because of poverty, investors see no reason to invest under such conditions. This forces poor countries to engage in a narrow range of economic activities that depend on physical endowments thus shutting themselves out of global markets.

2.3. *Good Governance*

Good Governance creates stability which in turn attracts private investments. The Task Team Report maintains that 'Economic development stalls when governments do not uphold the rule of law, pursue sound economic policy, make appropriate public investments, manage a public administration, protect basic human rights and support civil society organizations, including those representing poor people, in national decision making'. (Millennium Project Report to the UN Secretary General: 2005: p. 26).

A combination of these shortcomings exist in a number of Sub Saharan countries, sometimes not through deliberate bad governance but through circumstances beyond the control of governments. However in a number of cases such as in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Burundi and other post-conflict countries it was bad governance which in the first place led to conflict which in turn resulted in conditions leading to weak governance in the post conflict era. Similarly, Zimbabwe's problems emanate from bad governance which has paralysed service delivery and polarised the citizenry. In all these countries the position is either deteriorating with regard to some goals or there are no improvements at all. It is against these three preconditions that middle income countries such as South Africa, Botswana and Namibia are making very good progress on all the Millennium Development Goals with the exception of HIV/AIDS, but even in this case the position had stabilised by 2005 and the number of persons on anti-retro viral treatment drugs is on a steep increase. Also, countries with stable governments such as Uganda, Mozambique and Tanzania have made good progress in spite of low incomes.

3. Other factors

Besides internal conditions in the countries themselves, external conditions such as the behaviour of donor countries have not been kind to poor countries, especially Sub-Saharan countries. For instance, great portions of the loans have gone to salaries and fees of consultants from lending countries since the loans are given contingent upon the lending country sending its own nationals as programme designers and implementers because of the shortage or absence of technical staff in recipient countries. Secondly, a majority of poor countries are heavily in debt and have to spend large portions of their revenue derived from investment out of loans or donor funds in servicing debt. There is no coordination of lending and debt servicing in some of the donor countries themselves. Further, donor aid is not necessarily coordinated with the Millennium Development Goals and poor countries spend this on other development or what they deem to be priority programmes. Political realities may dictate otherwise and managing the tension between poverty reduction and other political imperatives is a normative rather than an ethical imperative.

4. Conclusion

Finally, the big question in the 21st century is: had the resources of the Sub-Saharan African countries not been plundered in the colonial era, and in the collusion between rich countries and African despots, how poor would Sub-Saharan Africa be? Secondly, should countries such as Angola, the Congo and others be owing these huge debts or should the question of reparation be brought into the equation? Perhaps dialogue in this direction may prove fruitful in the long run or Sub-Saharan Africa may never get out of its quagmire.