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Post MDGs development agenda: What future do we want and how can we achieve it?

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Introduction

The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – which range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education have been a milestone in global and national development efforts. The framework has helped to galvanize development efforts and guide global and national development priorities. The “post - 2015” development agenda has already attracted debates across the world raising questions as to how far we have gone, and what to do next. ESRF through TAKNET facilitated an inclusive consultation process, contributing to efforts to build the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Theoretical Context

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a set of eight goals agreed to by world leaders at the start of the 21st century to make global progress on: eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal

primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering women; reducing child mortality rates; improving maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development. The MDGs have been an influential framework for global development cooperation, not only in shaping the international discourse, but in driving the allocation of resources towards key global development priorities and improving policy monitoring. They have received unprecedented political commitment which reflects a strong consensus for tackling poverty eradication and other key priorities.

The MDGs are firmly embedded in the ‘human development’ paradigm of development. This was conceived as an alternative to a view that development could be measured entirely through economic growth. MDGs are also based on a donor-recipient model of aid, where developing countries have domestic financing needs, for example to provide health or education

services, which rich countries can help them meet through aid.

In 2015 the current set of MDG targets will expire. Trends clearly indicate that some progress has been made in most countries, particularly towards the goals of eradicating poverty and improving access to education. However, these trends have been uneven across countries and regions and among social groups. Success in poverty reduction, for instance, was concentrated in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia-China, in particular. In other parts of the world, including sub-Saharan Africa, and in countries with conflict or emerging from conflict, progress towards poverty reduction was modest.

Moreover, the assessment of progress towards the MDGs has repeatedly shown that the poorest and those disadvantaged because of gender, age, disability or ethnicity are often bypassed. Only one third of those countries that have reduced child mortality rates at the national level, for instance, have succeeded in reducing the gap between child mortality in the richest and poorest households.

The current goals and targets that make up the MDGs were debated and agreed in the late 1990s, when the world looked quite different. Most people lived in rural areas, and most poor people lived in poor countries. Climate change was a far-off concern, and far from the mainstream political issue that it is today. There was more optimism about what economic growth could deliver in terms of new jobs and improved living standards for all. A global strategy for development in 2015 will have to confront different challenges to those of the 1990s. What are the current problems, and how could a post-2015 agreement mobilise the necessary solutions?

TAKNET Discussions

Although the MDGs have helped to define a common framework of priorities, there is no denying that a re-think is needed. What is the most effective way to take the MDG agenda forward after 2015? As part of the efforts to build the Post-2015 Development Agenda, it was crucial for stakeholders in Tanzania to dialogue. Thus, ESRF through TAKNET facilitated an online discussion with the following objectives:

- Ensuring that stakeholders at different levels are involved in providing inputs to Tanzania's development agenda and building a shared global vision;
- Identifying and analyzing issues pertinent to the Post MDG Development Agenda;
- Arriving at a consensus on the Post MDG Development Agenda.

A key component of drawing-up the post-2015 agenda is learning lessons from the MDGs through examining what has worked and what hasn't. There was a lively online discussion through TAKNET, where as many as 31 people took part with 68 entries. None of the entries made a direct reference to MDGs in terms of the framework, indicators and targets, and instead, the discussion was more general focussing on development opportunities and challenges facing Tanzania. Below is a summary of the issues discussed:

i. Post MDGs and What Tanzania Needs

Broadly speaking, the greatest challenge still facing Tanzania and other African countries is the pressure to deliver simultaneously on the three issues - sustainable economic growth (in terms of GDP), sustainable development (in its transformational nature), and poverty reduction (in its distributional sense). From the discussions, specific areas were singled out including free primary and secondary education, health services, water, and affordable electricity particularly in rural areas and infrastructure (ports, railway and road networks), and skilled personnel (including doctors, engineers, geologists, pilots etc) who will be able to take the country to the next level.

These priorities were cited by Apronius Mbilinyi, Omari Khamis, and Sallu Johnson. These are more or less the same needs that existed prior to the MDGs. This implies that priorities have not changed significantly and that although some progress has been made since year 2000,

there is still a long way to go in all these areas.

ii. Capacity Constraints

It was strongly argued that adequate implementation capacity in the form of "skilled labour" is one of the critical missing factors in the current efforts by Tanzania to meet the MDGs. Development efforts have failed, even when supported with substantially funding. *"This is a country with very few professionals (e.g. doctors, engineers, etc) despite the fact that few are working in the diaspora. If we compare Tanzania with other developing nations such as China, India, or Brazil, we will find that the higher learning and vocational skilled graduates produced in a year are very few in comparison"* said Apronius Vitalis Mbilinyi. Development of sustainable capacity should therefore be given greater attention in the future.

Vocational skills and training was cited as a critical gap in the country's development endeavours. *"We don't have adequate skilled personnel to take this country forward. This is especially true with the middle level of the skills ladder where vocational skills matter a lot. Not long ago we wanted to turn every 'good looking' school or institution into a 'University' – probably a good undertaking, but when is the country really going to seriously invest in developing vocational skills/technology institutions?"* asked Joel Kalagho.

However, some of the discussants felt that the issue is not inadequate capacity,

but rather capacity utilization. *"Tanzania has enough skilled personel within and abroad who if well utilised by the government, then we can achieve desired development"* argued John Seka.

iii. Country Ownership and Aid Dependency

Country ownership is characterized by government, communities, civil society and private sector-able to lead, prioritize, implement and be accountable. It was argued that the government should take stronger leadership of its own development agenda, and engage with its parliament and citizens in shaping policies. Too often, development partners are driven more by their own political interests or policy preferences or development orthodoxies than by the needs of the countries they support.

The endemic nature of dependency by African countries (including Tanzania) on foreign aid seems to support the popular view that the continent is incapable of an existence free from aid. Budgets for national projects are planned based on expected aid flows, the implication being that these projects often fail because, among other reasons, aid fails to materialize or is misused. *"The future we want for Tanzania should not be dependent upon donors and foreigners. Aid has done nothing substantial to this country's development and we have all the reasons to mobilize whatever resources available to attain the MDGs..."* said Audax Rukonge.

Some of the discussants pointed out that foreign aid has not had

the intended effect considering that investments in the country have remained minimal and wellbeing unimpressive. It is more appropriate to argue that aid has actually been a source of disincentive to local initiatives in Tanzania and many other African countries.

However, some of the discussants had a different view as to the contribution of aid to development. *"I have read a lot of criticisms about aid, but honestly, if we fail to acknowledge its role in reducing human sufferings, then we are betraying humanity. The role of aid in reducing infant mortality and maternal deaths as well as deaths caused by malaria and HIV/AIDS can not be disputed"* argued Dastan Kweka.

iv. Natural Resource Endowment

Tanzania is richly endowed with natural resources ranging from water bodies, forest reserves, abundant wildlife, as well as exploitable hydrocarbons, and minerals. By transforming these resources through sustainable productive activities into higher value and export-ready products, the country could attain the national development strategy's vision for a stronger, more balanced, broad-based and private sector-driven economic structure. *"Tanzania is an endowed and richly blessed with multiple resouces that are geographically spread across the country"* emphasized Sallu Johnson. He also pointed out that, *"geographically, Tanzania is also strategically placed more than many African countries as it offers a gateway to more than seven land locked countries*

with a coastline of over a 1,000 kilometers. This alone is envied by many its competitors".

The absence of strong institutions and a clear framework has impeded a healthy and profitable exploitation of resources. *"The government has been receiving bad advise in the area of gold mining and mining of other minerals. We are going to be left with open pits while the gold is all mined out and has not contributed fully to the development of Tanzania"* lamented Omari Mwinyi Khamis. How the country manages its natural resources and the associated revenues will have a profound impact on the future course of the economy and the prosperity of Tanzanians.

v. Science, Technology and Innovation

Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) is key to fostering productivity growth and achieving social welfare and sustainable development. The vision for a significant improvement in the quality of life, competitiveness and overall prosperity in Africa can only be achieved and sustained through a sincere commitment to STI development.

In the last few decades, significant advancements have been made in the global economy resulting in a departure from traditional production processes. The increasing needs of the society in the face of limited resources have propelled renewed thinking towards efficiency. This requires improved knowledge of science and technology.

It came out clearly from the

discussion that optimizing the benefits of STI should be an increasing priority for the government. "We need to be more innovative. If you compare Tanzania and other middle income countries, you could see the difference is the level of innovation. "We need to improve on innovation and that links to technology. Government policies, strategies, plans and programmes should consider innovation in all aspects" said Vivian Kazi.

vi. Agriculture and Food Security

Agriculture is a major source of income, employment and food security for the rural population. Although Tanzania is not considered a food-deficit country, normally producing over most of her food requirements, high post harvest losses, inefficient distribution systems and low incomes make food access a major concern for many rural households especially in the semi-arid areas of central and northern Tanzania. Tanzanian agriculture still has numerous weaknesses including in the area of rural infrastructure (feeder roads, markets, storage facilities, among others), technology and agro-processing. "Tanzania should declare a moratorium on famine and hunger. This

would mean, we mobilize the necessary resources towards addressing food insecurity. This must be linked with rigorous analysis on regional potentials which has to be followed by resource mobilization (finance, capital and human) to maximize such potential within regions" (Audax Rukonge).

Conclusion

Any meaningful discussion of Africa's post MDG priorities should be grounded in Africa's experiences and lessons learnt with the MDGs. African countries will have to transform their economies in ways that not only support rapid and inclusive growth but also generate enough domestic resources to offset shortfalls in external financing. The development discourse in Africa has overemphasized donor funding, thus creating foreign aid-dependency and reinforcing an imbalanced partnership between recipients and donors.

From the TAKNET discussions, it is evident that given the levels of achievement, priorities for Tanzania have not changed significantly since year 2000. To achieve any meaningful development, the country should seriously take into account the following:

- Ensuring strong ownership of the development agenda by Tanzanians;
- Consolidating what has already been achieved and continue with efforts to improve social service delivery;
- Capacity development at all levels including enhancing skills through vocational training;
- Fostering science, technology and innovation in efforts to achieve sustainable development;
- Improving the state of infrastructure (roads, ports, energy, and water and port facilities);
- Managing the natural resource base in a sustainable manner that will bring prosperity to the people; and
- Transforming the agriculture sector with a view of reducing poverty and ensuring food security.

The key questions should now be centered on the new framework come 2015. Should the MDGs be retained in their current configuration? Should they be reformulated, or replaced by an alternative framework? Underlying all these is the question of which option is likely to have the greatest impact in Africa.

This Policy Brief was synthesized from contributions of the following: Audax Rukonge, Shabbir Bhalloo, Dastan Kweka, Costa John Kanaysu, Abdallah K. Hassan, Apronius Vitalis Mbilinyi, Omari Mwinyi Khamis, Sallu Johnson, Neemak Eddy Kasunga, Japhet Makongo, Lelansi Mwakibibi, Martanus Ochola Omoro, Bariki Karosi Kaale, Fredrick Mashingia, Salum Issaka, Vivian Kazi, John Seka, Rugeiyamu Kahwa, Otto Matern Muba, Elisha Sibale, Athanas Haule, Catherine Kowero, Donald Dickson Kibhuti, Ojung Loy, Joel A. Kalagho, Benjamin Nkonya, Hebron Mwakalinga, Omari Mkombole, Anthony Gikuri, John Magoha and Emmanuel Ole Kambainei.



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