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## THE GOVERNANCE DIMENSION OF THE MDGs IN AFRICA.

MAY 21 2008

*CONFERENCE AND BOOK PROJECT*

### *Conference overview*

This conference is the second event in a series of four conferences organized by the United Nations University and Cornell University on Africa (The UNU-Cornell Africa Series) that maps out the scientific and policy knowledge in four critical areas: *Food and Nutrition System* (November 2007), *The Governance Dimension of the MDGs* (May 2008), *HIV/AIDS and Public Health* (tentatively in June 2008) and *Environment and Sustainability* (July 2008). A final event, to take place in fall 2008, will outline the lessons learned from the preceding events and make policy recommendations. Compared to the other conferences that focus on more technical and thematic issues, this conference sets up the conceptual, institutional and policy framework addressing in depth the implementation problems linked to the MDGs. It provides the bigger picture and asks what needs to be done, from an institutional and political point of view, to achieve the MDGs in Africa.

Through this process, UNU and Cornell University, in cooperation with the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA), the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, and other UN agencies and African academic institutions, will advance fundamental knowledge and policy formation in the aforementioned areas in the African context, which will strengthen future capacity development initiatives in the region. This joint effort is meant to lay the groundwork leading to the high-level meeting on “Africa’s Development Needs,” which will be held on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2008 during the UN General Assembly and the high level summit on the Millennium Development Goals to be held on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2008. The Africa Series will bring together leading African academic experts and others from around the globe, UN and NGO practitioners. Four volumes will be published from the proceedings of these events. An online forum will be created to engage more participation in the discussion of the key areas of the Series. Multimedia will be used to maximize interaction outreach of the Series through webcasting the events and video conferencing with universities and experts in Africa.

### ***Overview of the MDGs in Africa***

Africa as a whole is lagging behind in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Even though the MDGs are the top priority of the United Nations, especially with the establishment of an MDGs Africa Steering Group by the Secretary General in September 2007, progress was rather slow and scattered around the continent. At the midway point between their adoption in 2000 and the 2015 target date for achieving the MDGs, most African counties are not on track to achieve any of the goals (see attached annex). Africa has the lowest income per capita and the lowest life expectancy among developing countries. For instance, reaching the MDG target of halving the extent of extreme poverty by 2015 requires a renewed commitment as 41.1% of people are still living under one dollar a day in Africa. For the goal of achieving universal primary education, a gap of 18 per cent remains. Africa is also lagging behind with regards to gender equality, child mortality, maternal health, AIDS and other diseases and environmental stability. The health situation is especially a source of concern. Child survival rates are significantly worse in Sub-Saharan Africa with 166 out 1,000 children

dying before the age of five in 2005. Most other developing countries have less than 100 under five-mortality rate. Half a million women continue to die each year during pregnancy or childbirth, almost all of them in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. HIV prevalence has leveled off in the developing world but deaths from AIDS continue to rise in Africa.<sup>1</sup> These issues are all the more urgent as nearly 40% of world conflicts are taking place in Sub-Saharan Africa and their incidence is rising. Of course, the picture is not universally bleak and there are some success stories throughout the continent. Many countries have abolished fees for primary schools resulting in dramatic increases in enrolment during the space of a few years. In 2006 some countries cancelled fees for basic rural health services and introduced free medical care for mothers and children. Overall, many African governments, with growing donor support, are now taking to national scale the lessons of the Millennium Villages – that local leadership and a combination of interventions can transform poor communities in a short period of time.<sup>2</sup> Despite these successes, everything points to the fact that accelerated progress is direly needed.

### ***A failing implementation strategy***

Why then is Africa lagging behind? Partly because there is a governance failure. This seems all the more paradoxical as the African continent is one in which the international development community is most heavily engaged. The reasons for this are complex but the onus is clearly put on governance. The UN Millennium Project lists four reasons for the shortfalls in achieving the MDGs: governance failure, poverty trap, pockets of poverty and areas of specific policy neglect.<sup>3</sup> This raises the question of who should implement the MDGs and how. Where did governance fail? Is it at the level of the international community or at the level of the individual state? Most of the analyses are focused on the international level and on what the international community can do. The

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<sup>1</sup> See *Africa and the Millennium Development Goals. 2007 Update*, New York, 2007, available at <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/docs/MDGafrika07.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See *Ibid*, p.3

<sup>3</sup> See *Investing in Development. A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals*, UN Millennium Project, Report to the UN Secretary General, New York, 2005, pp.15-23, available at <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/reports/index.htm>

implementation of MDGs as seen from the point of view of the international community means disbursing development aid, providing technical assistance, supporting country policies and monitoring the achievements of the goals. This means that the key actor to achieve the MDGs is the state with the international community only playing a supporting role. What the lack of progress of the MDGs in Africa clearly highlights are the limitations of the African state in formulating and implementing a development policy, i.e. its governance failure and the fact that the United Nations and other international institutions tend to ignore local or regional initiatives, such as those of the African Union and NEPAD.

Most of the development literature on the MDGs suffers from an economic bent. Today's development literature equates growth to development without raising the question of wealth distribution, social equity or the level of public allocation of resources. Increased growth will not lead to increased development if it is accompanied by increased exclusion and inequalities.<sup>4</sup> This only bolsters the argument in favor of a greater focus on the governance dimension of the MDGS in Africa at the domestic, regional and international levels.

### ***Strengthening the African state***

The purpose of this symposium is to take a close look at the institutional framework set up to implement the MDGs with the developing state as its cornerstone. The situation in Africa is but the most obvious symptom of the defective institutional structure set in place to achieve the MDGs. This structure is based on the assumption that the individual state is willing and able to set up an effective development policy aimed at achieving the MDGs. This might not always be the case, some states being corrupt and others being weak. There is in fact a strong correlation between effective political institutions and the level of development. Where the state is weak, where it is not performing well key functions, the level of development lags behind... This conference addresses this key

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<sup>4</sup> This case is convincingly made in Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, 'Rethinking the Policy Objectives of Development Aid. From Economic Growth to Conflict Prevention,' UNU-WIDER Research Paper No. 2007/32, available at <http://www.wider.unu.edu/publications/publications.htm>

factor that has been overlooked in the MDGs debate: can the developing state, and in this specific case, can the African state implement the MDGs? Does it have the legitimacy and the capability to do so? Is decentralization a plausible solution as a way to strengthen and make the African state more accountable politically, administratively and fiscally? <sup>5</sup>

***What role for regional institutions such as the African Union or NEPAD?***

Beyond the African states, regional institutions such as the African Union Commission, the NEPAD Secretariat and the APRM Secretariat with their emphasis on governance all address areas of development that could have a positive impact on the achievements of the MDGs. What specific role could these institutions play? How could it be coordinated with the domestic agenda of the African state and that of the United Nations and the international community at large? The regional institutions in Africa can have a positive impact in the domain of peace and security as a prerequisite to the MDGs and in the area of governance.

The Millennium Declaration included not only the MDGs but also clearly expressed the need for peace and security as a prerequisite to the achievement of these goals. In fact, numerous statistical studies have established strong reciprocal causal links between low incomes, low growth and the occurrence of violent conflict.<sup>6</sup> If war undermines development, it obviously has a drastic negative impact on the achievement of the MDGs. It is important therefore that Africa can develop a peace-building capacity to prevent conflicts, improve security, and sustain post-conflict recovery. Regional integration both at the continental and sub-continental level can be a major tool in developing peace and security and thus contribute to the achievement of the MDGs. At the continental level, African states have also taken the initiative to address governance issues with the African Peer Review Mechanism. The APRM is an instrument voluntarily

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<sup>5</sup> See Stephen Ndegwa, 'Decentralization in Africa: A Stocktaking Survey,' *Africa Region Working Paper Series*, No. 40, November 2002.

<sup>6</sup> See Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, 2002, 'Greed and Grievance in Civil Wars,' CSAE Working Paper Series No. 2002-01, Oxford Centre for the Study of African Economies, available at [www.csae.ox.ac.uk](http://www.csae.ox.ac.uk). See also Ibrahim Elbadawi and Nicholas Sambanis, 2002, 'How Much Civil War Will We see? Explaining the Prevalence of Civil War,' *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 46(3): 307-34. Or James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, 2003, 'Ethnicity, Insurgency and Civil War,' *American Political Science Review*, 97(1): 75-90.

acceded to by Member States of the African Union as an African self-monitoring mechanism to ensure that the policies and practices of participating states conform to the agreed political, economic and corporate governance values, codes and standards contained in the Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance. How can the APRM mechanism work hand in hand with the United Nations to help the African state in its efforts to achieve better governance? At a broader level, how can the regional initiatives in the domain of security and governance be put to use for the achievement of the MDGs?

### ***Reforming the implementation structure of the MDGs***

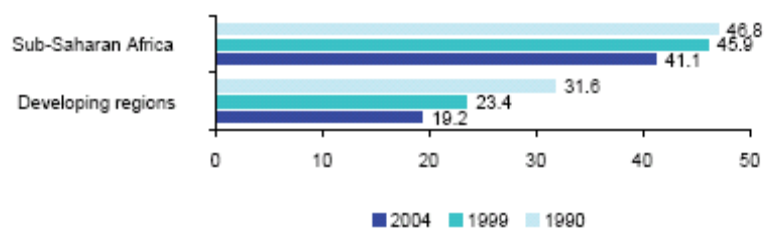
If the key actor to achieve peace and security, as well as the MDGs, is the African state, can the regional organizations and the international community help in the achievement of these goals? Is there an emerging pattern of burden sharing with the MDGs being the domain of action of the UN and the international community, and the conflict, security and governance agenda being a regional one? But does this burden sharing ignore the African state? The international community and the African regional organizations seem to have two different sets of priorities: can they meet? Do they complement or compete with each other? How can one make the different levels work together? Can the international and regional levels acts as enablers for the achievement of the MDGs at the national level?

## **ANNEX: Africa, still far from the MDGs**

Source: *Africa and the Millennium Development Goals: 2007 update*. Published by the UN Department of Public Information, DPI/2458, June 2007.

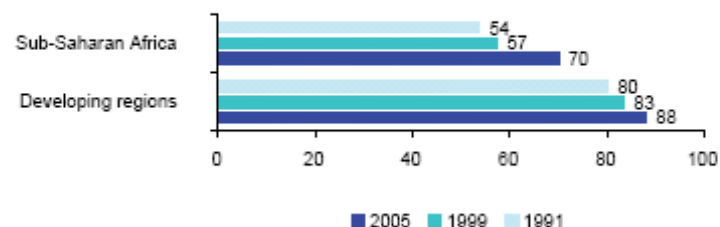
### **Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**

Proportion of people living on less than \$1 a day, 1990, 1999 and 2004 (Percentage)



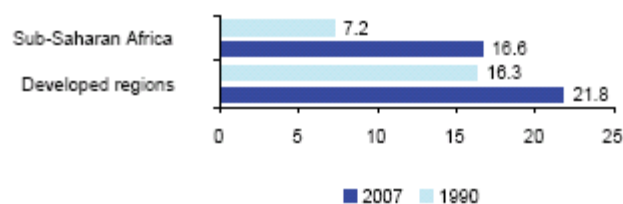
### **Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education**

Total net enrolment ratio in primary education, 1990/1991, 1998/1999 and 2004/2005 (Percentage)



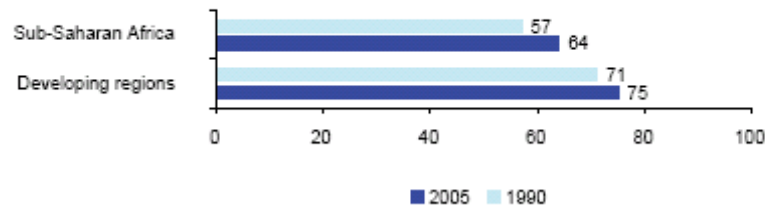
### **Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women**

Share of women in single or lower houses of parliament, 1990 and 2007 (Percentage)



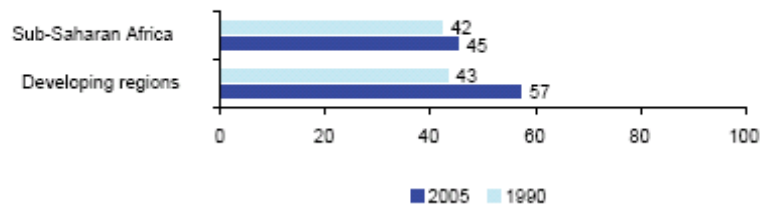
## Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Percentage of children 12-23 months old who received at least one dose of measles vaccine



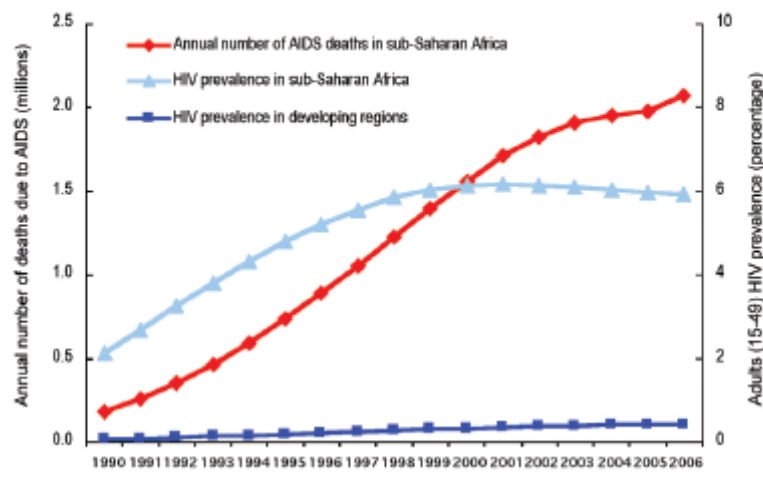
## Goal 5: Improve maternal health

Maternal health: Proportion of deliveries attended by skilled health care personnel, 1990 and 2005



## Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

HIV prevalence in adults aged 15-49 in sub-Saharan Africa and all developing regions (Percentage) and number of AIDS deaths in sub-Saharan Africa (Millions), 1990-2006



## Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

## Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development