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GLOBAL INTERGRATION AND THE CHALLENGES OF MELLINIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs) IN AFRICA: A THEORETICAL APPROACH

Ndigwe-Anazodo Princess Vivian Ngozika* & Agaba Halidu**
Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Abuja, Abuja-Nigeria

Abstract

Theory has influenced policy in international development but the interaction has been a two-way process. While theories legitimated new policy, appraisal of policy and experience have given rise to theoretical insights. But of the many competing ideas and theories, which ones influence policy? This paper analyzes the influence of ***Sen's capability and human development approach*** *on the recent evolution of policy agendas in international development, notably the consensus on MDGs and on poverty as the priority concern. It argues that the capability approach played an important role in the contestations over structural adjustment and Washington Consensus policies that led to the new consensus over the MDGs, and help legitimize them. The neoliberal policy approaches of the Washington Consensus remain intact. This illustrates an important distinction between normative and causative ideas. The new consensus has adopted the normative ideas of the capability approach but not the causative ideas. These normative ideas were used to provide a new narrative for international development, not a new policy framework.*

Keywords: Millennium, Development, Goals, Theory, Poverty & Gender

Introduction:

The African continent consists of the greatest number of the least developed nations in the world. Yet it has the greatest number of the world's population. The sub-Saharan Africa seems to be the worst region of the entire continent. It is also the host of numerous national and man-made disasters. These slow down human development in the continent and by implication in the world at large. By this token, Africa has become a recipient of aids from donor nations.

In September 2000, 147 Heads of states (about 189 countries across the various continents of the world) met at the United Nations (UN) head quarters in New York to resolve the most pressing problems of humanity and nature (Attaran, 2005) which include poverty, education, gender and health issues. They expressed their commitment by setting numerical targets and deadlines to measure performance. These are known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with a wide range of topics including Education, Gender, Health and poverty. Modernists view MDGs as a blueprint for transformation and development. Peet and Hartwick (1999) cite that development is measured by the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross National Product (GNP), measures of economic growth which assume that development is attained if a certain level of economic growth is reached.

By using the GDP and GNP, the World Bank and UN agencies have established that most Sub-Saharan African countries are unlikely to achieve the MDGs by 2015 as stipulated in their summits. For example the UN millennium report, (2005) notes that the picture in Sub-Saharan Africa is not optimistic. Other authors including Easterly (2008) and Attaran (2005) concur with this view but question how the lack of progress is being measured. They contend that most of the indicators used to measure the MDGs are insufficient and depend on unreliable or unavailable data. This contributes to the perception of Africa as "off track" in achieving the MDGs when in fact it could have been determined from the on-set that they will not achieve the goals.

The challenges faced by African countries in achieving MDGs are not purely economic or related to growth in GDP. There are also political and governance issues involved in reducing progress made by African countries. Some MDG critics posit that donor's aid or debt relief, corruption and other necessary disasters should be blamed for the failure to achieve MDGs. For instance Clemens et al. (2007) argue that it is the limitations of aid and other policies that hinder the achievement of MDGs. Other critics consider MDGs as well intentioned but poorly thought through, thus distracting attention from more appropriate targets and more effective policies and actions (Hulme, 2009).

The focus of this paper is not to underestimate the importance of high GDP levels for attainment of MDG's. Rather it provides an analysis of the MDGs in relation to the paradox of economic growth and poverty reduction. In the process, each of the MDGs was discussed in conjunction with some of the challenges facing Sub-Saharan African countries in achieving them.

Summary of Recommended Goals:

The goal one was meant to (a) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (b) fully funded the Future's three-year budget of $3.5 billion and (c) Pursue the country-led, whole-of-society approach of Feed the Future.

The goal two was made to (a) achieve universal primary education (b) launch a Global Education Initiative to galvanize and coordinate education assistance that boosts access and quality and leads to host country sustainability (c) devote sufficient resources to close the global Education for All funding gap (c) provide meaningful support for a reformed and independent Education for All Fast Track Initiative (d) Ensure educational opportunities are provided to marginalized children and youth.

The goal three was meant to (a) Promote gender equality and empower women (b) Integrate gender into all foreign assistance policies and programs (c) Pass the International Violence Against Women Act and ratify the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (d) Create an Office of Gender Integration, which reports directly to the USAID Administrator (e) Focus educational assistance on overcoming barriers to girls in school.

Goal number four was designed to Reduce child mortality; goal five was meant to Improve maternal health; and goal six was made to (a) Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (b) Fully fund and implement the President's Global Health Initiative (c) Fulfill commitments to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and other health programs (d) Scale up efforts in fragile and disease-burdened states, and design and implement health programs in relief environments that lay the foundation for strengthening health systems and transitions to development (e) Support research for effective and sustainable prevention and treatment programs (f) Support the G8's Muskoka Initiative on maternal, newborn and child mortality, and play a leadership role in promoting the Joint Action Plan for Maternal and Child Health to be launched at the September UN MDG Summit (g) Promote gender equity and assure equality of access to health care.

The goal seven was to (a) Ensure environmental sustainability (b) Tackle climate change domestically in the U.S. to support and facilitate an international agreement through the UNFCCC (UN Framework Convention on Climate Change) process (c) Develop a comprehensive strategy for water, sanitation and hygiene development assistance (d) Develop a comprehensive international urban development policy.

Goal eight was to (a) Develop a global partnership for development Trade, Expand full duty-free and quota- market access to all exports from the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) (b) Eliminate rules of origin that restrict input sourcing to increase market access for LDCs (c) Encourage and support South-South and regional trade (d) Ensure U.S. trade and agriculture policies do not undermine U.S. development objectives (e) Debt: Promote the expansion of the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI) (f) Promote debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries facing exogenous shocks from the continuing global financial crisis (g) Reduce odious debt (h)Partnerships: Implement the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action principles on aid effectiveness decentralize the strategic planning process, moving it to the country level, and re-invigorate USAID missions as the lead development agency for this country-level planning (i) Work with U.S. and local civil society to strengthen local ownership and build national capacity (j) improve coordination across U.S. Government agencies involved in development programming and finally, developing a global partnership for development (Nigeria: Millennium Development Goals, 2010).

Theoretical Exposition: The Symbiotic Development Paradigm:

For many decades, humankind has engaged in a lingering debate over the real causes of development and underdevelopment around the world. Two schools of knowledge–Modernization and Dependency have featured predominantly in this debate. The Modernization school argues that the west, unlike the Third world such as Africa, is developed because it has socio-political and economic attributes (culture, values & attitudes) that are progressive and amenable to positive change and development. Thus, the Third world like Africa can experience development if they copy Western values and its artifacts of civilization (Ake, 1979).

On the other hand, Dependency school disagrees with the Modernization thesis, but rather argues that underdevelopment in Africa is a direct consequence of economic exploitation it experienced as a result of Western development which started from slave trade through colonialism to neo-colonialism and which was institutionalized following the disarticulation, monetization and incorporation of African economy into the global economic capitalist system. Hence the only way out of underdevelopment is for Africa to delink and chart a new path to development that is totally independent of the West (Rodney, 1972).

Objectively speaking, both theories have their merits and demerits. We argue that neither of them can single-handedly and adequately address the crisis of development in Africa today. While total delinking is not practicable in this era of globalization, Westernization has been experimented in Africa and it failed. We therefore propose that it is high time the global conversation from North to South, and between Western scholarship and the rest, about the genuine approach to solving the crisis of development, is shifted towards harmonization and unification of the strengths of both theories to evolve a 'symbiotic development paradigm' that is inclusive and beneficial to all peoples and cultures. It is on this type of mutual development framework whose aim will be to uproot global inequalities and poverty, and replace them with prosperity and happiness, that I anchor my analysis.

Theoretical Foundation of MDGs:

Third world elites are understood to be guided by western models thus adopting and adapting its technology, assimilating its values and patterns of action as well as importing its financial industrial and educational institutions. In return, they gain foreign aid and overseas business investments which serve as important channels for the transmission of western values (Valenzuela, 1978). Several theories have been used to explain the rationales behind these practices as well as certain development policies such as the MDGs adopted by International Financial Institutions. Of particular relevance to this paper is modernization theory. This is a functionalist and evolutionary approach in the development and social sciences discipline, which maintains that countries are autonomous units that develop through stages and transform from traditional societies to modern forms (Fangjun, 2009).

The theory stipulates that nonwestern societies would only attain the stage of being developed if they acquire the instrumental rationalities of western societies (Dibua, 2006). From observations of trends towards urbanization and industrialization in Europe and North America, Karl Max, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber became original tenets of modernization theory. They made heuristic distinctions between tradition and modernity (Wheeler, 2005). Schuurman (2000) notes modernization theory's unconditional belief in the concept of progress.

By 1930s, the focus of modernization theory shifted to the United States and Talcott Parsons became the leading scholar. Parsons developed a blue print for less developed societies by looking at the way of life of Europeans and Americans (Wheeler, 2005). Rostow (1968) and other scholars on modernization theory lobbied for and formulated United States policies on development assistance such as military assistance in the context of the cold war. While Parsons had a holistic social theory, Rostow had a quasi-Marxist stress on the forces of production (Wheeler, 2005). In accordance with modernization theory, Rostow's (1968) stages of economic growth stipulates that for Third World countries to develop, they must go through similar historical stages experienced by Western states (also in Dibua, 2006). MDGs are therefore viewed as the path to development for Third World countries.

Some modernization theory proponents contend that it might have some worthwhile core ideas. Wheeler (2005) mentions five modernization policies in China without which the country would have remained stagnant. He notes the transformation of industry, agriculture and science and technology and representative democracy as particularly important in China. Jiafeng (2009) believes that the modern society has not brought the demise of traditional values; rather it has provided tradition with improved status and environment.

Therefore, by defining a singular path to progressive change, the concept of modernization was able to simplify the complicated world historical problems of decolonization and industrialization thereby helping to guide American economic aid and military intervention in post-colonial regions. This view is according to (Gilman, 2003) who adds that unfortunately, modernization theory was hopelessly reductionist in its conception of change abroad. The criticisms of modernization theory are worth being noted because they help point out where Africa is lacking in terms of development. Later discussions on MDGs would show that modernization theory is fundamentally conservative in its policies and blindly reflective of the political and social prejudices of mid-century American establishment.

Paradox of Economic Growth and Poverty Trends:

The World Bank (2004) suggests that GDP of 7 per cent over 15 years is required to halve poverty rates in Africa but average regional growth is 2.4% for the past 15years. Only Botswana and Equatorial Guinea have beaten 7 per cent over this period indicating that the required growth is too high for many countries to reach. This complements Easterly's (2008) view that the MDGs were set up in ways that limited Africa's chances of attaining them in relation to other regions. While various studies have provided insights into the causes of low growth in African countries, authors like

Easterly and Levine (1997) contend that the contradiction between Africa's growth and poverty incidences remain open to debate.

On the other hand authors like Kanbur (2001) assert that economic growth is required to achieve the poverty reduction goal. However reforms and growth have evidently not led to significant decline of poverty over the years. Estimates by the International Labor Office (ILO) indicate that the rate of extreme working poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa has increased from 57.7 per cent in 2008 to an increase in 67.7 per cent (ILO, 2010). Several studies found that poverty has increased in a number of countries, despite growth in the long run. It can be concluded from this evidence that sustained poverty reduction cannot be guaranteed by increase in economic growth thus raising concerns about the possibility of the poor benefiting from long run growth. In order to achieve pro-poor growth, countries must develop policies that have the potential of increasing growth and reducing poverty simultaneously.

The Dilemma in Conflict States:

Having outlined the debate about the relationship between poverty and economic growth using evidence from the most affected regions in Sub-Saharan Africa, it becomes clear that there are other underlying factors responsible for Africa's failure to achieve the MDGs. Jan Vande Moortele (2007) one of the originators of MDGs, adds that the performance of conflict ridden states in meeting their MDG targets is inadequate owing to disruptions in their government institutions, inadequate capacity and uncertainty in the legitimacy of their institutions (Hill et al., 2010). For example hunger is prevalent in countries like Somalia, Sudan and Congo all of which face increasing instability and lack infrastructure (Toronto star, 2010). Stewart (2003) found that during conflicts in some countries, military expenditure may be prioritized to the detriment of social expenditure. For example attention was diverted from MDGs when the Sudanese government failed to deliver most social services to Southern Sudan. Also, Many African countries have not made progress in satisfying the G8 prerequisite goals for the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative because they are faced with internal conflicts. The HIPC itself has been criticized for involving little funds and being limited in scope (Holland, 2008). The IMF (2003) cites that due to the G8 criteria, many countries have been excluded from debt relief despite being equally poor and more indebted than the HIPCs. For example despite Nigeria being the greatest debtor and largest economy in Africa (Holland, 2008), the presence of internal conflict alone (Boko Haram in Nigeria) can render the country ineligible for debt relief. These and the inability to participate in Global commercial trade hinder Africa's achievement of MDG goal 8.

Over-reliance on Aid and Persistence of Poverty:

Some advocates of MDGs agree that more aid is needed by African countries to achieve their targets because a lack of aid has worsened Africa's problems and that there is a link between aid and growth (Taylor, 2006). Clemens et al. (2007) add that leaders in development believe in donor willingness to provide sufficient quantities of funds as a condition for achieving the MDGs. However, regardless of aid increase, many Sub-Saharan African countries will not achieve the MDGs by 2015. This is because African governments do not use their funds efficiently (Clapham, 1996).

Another challenge with MDGs is that African countries continue to rely on Official Development Assistance (ODA) from western countries. An argument posed by Clemens (2007) states that increases in aid must be accompanied by other necessary conditions. Where these fail to materialize, those who support aid as a necessary condition for meeting MDGs may be disappointed to find aid being blamed for false failures. This is because donors have no control over other conditions necessary for MDGs to be met such as economic growth and improved policies and institutions (Clemens, 2007). According to Nwonwu (2005) the trend of meeting ODA obligations of developed countries is associated with loss of independence by states, occasioned by dependence on meagre domestic resources and largely on ODA.

The latter is often tied to donor benchmarks of conditionalities that may not necessarily tally with the recipient country's objectives and priorities. Toronto Star (2010) reiterates that provision of foreign aid without the necessary political will and functioning institutions results in waste and mismanagement of funds. This paper therefore argues that aid will help in achieving the MDGs but it has to be complemented with policies to reduce violence, root out corruption and increase investment in infrastructure.

Therefore, regardless of increased aid flows, so many countries are not likely to reduce poverty by half given that the required growth will be far too high by historical standards. It is also doubtful that aid will increase growth that would halve poverty in Africa (Clemens et al., 2007). To illustrate, former Nigeria's president Obasanjo's government had a windfall of budget surplus of $13 billion between 2003 and 2007. Oil income more than doubled in 2006, meaning that economic pressures were off. However, in the same year, Nigeria had the largest numbers of absolute poor people in the world after China and India, indicating 70 per cent or 84 million people (Dowden, 2008).

This outcome can clarify the extent of funds mismanagement in Nigeria. According to Dowden (2008) corruption has become such an important part of Nigeria's politics that politicians can be so open about it. Nigeria is the most corrupt country according to transparency international (Dowden, 2008).

Another problem affecting poor countries is that they are simply too poor to invest in programs that are likely to reduce, eliminate diseases and provide adequate infrastructure. As a result, the countries are unable to attain economic growth and subsequently the MDGs. In Sub-Saharan Africa where geographical conditions are not favorable, there is a greater chance of poverty traps occurring. Factors that cause poverty traps include high transport costs, tropical diseases such as malaria and adverse conditions for agriculture such as dependency on rain fed agriculture in sub humid or arid regions (Sachs & Mcarthur, 2005).

In addition, Clapham (1996) asserts that the most important factor underlying the weakness of African states and their vulnerability to internal fragmentation and external penetration is their record of economic failure. According to this author, economic success plays a role in countries' political economy and diplomatic respect while stagnation and decay play a role in their dependence on the uncertain, conditional charity of western donor states and western institutions.

Top-down Approach to MDGs:

In order to illustrate policymaking and Africa's participation in decision-making as it relates to MDGs, Held (cited in Bond, 2004) notes that the MDGs were non-transparently generated by the elite UN agencies. At the same time, the UN agencies, in collaboration with the World Bank, moved to embrace the Washington consensus with its agenda on public private partnership. This indicates a top-down approach to setting and achieving MDG targets. Although the MDGs emerged as a result of consultative processes between the developed and developing countries, they are used as the platform by which western countries assert development policies over African nations.

This represents a modernist perspective, which assumes that non-western societies would only attain the stage of being developed if they acquire the instrumental rationalities of western societies (Dibua, 2006). As such, a modernist approach would prescribe the increase in economic growth in order for a country to be developed. Bond further notes that the institutions, which set the targets, are so far from the people who own the struggles and their victories (Bond, 2004). According to Dibua (2006) development programs, which are in line with modernization theory, have failed to take into account the socio-economic realities of African countries (Dibua, 2006). For example Elson (2004) states that neo-liberal policies imposed by western countries have played a part in and have had adverse impacts on progress towards achievement of the MDGs in Africa.

Are the MDGs Attainable?

Peet and Hartwick (1999) establish the basis for measuring development and their links with the Human Development Index (HDI). In the process, they criticize the measurability of development and the challenges to its measurement. Peetb and Hartwick (1999) argue that official data used to explain economic and socio-cultural characteristics of society are flawed, asserting that they tend to be unreliable and inaccurate. For instance, data for the health MDGs are insufficient and unreliable because even the most basic indicators such as births and deaths are not directly registered in the poorest countries (Attaran, 2005).

In addition, GNP or GDP only consider production in the formal market and ignore the informal product consumption and exchange. It is also argued by critics that GNP and GDP measure economic modernization according to how closely countries replicate the characteristics of the west (Peet & Hartwick, 1999). Nwonwu (2008) highlights the difficulty in assessing performance based on quantitative rather than qualitative yardsticks. He notes the ambiguity of using relative quantities such as ratios that do not portray exact situations. In other words, GDP and GNP are not sufficient for measuring development because they focus on quantity (how many people benefitting and how much gained) rather than quality of life (Peet & Hartwick, 1999).

In addition, Bond (2006) notes that the restriction of MDG goals to quantifiable indicators is flawed because other important issues such as women's inequality and empowerment may not necessarily be quantifiable. Also, goals including violence against women and sexual and reproductive rights are overlooked. Easterly (2009) opine that all these limitations make MDGs highly unattainable in Africa. Easterly (2009) adds that the MDGs might be intentionally set up by the western countries to portray the universal failure of Africa so as to attract additional attention to foreign aid resources, or even to assert western policies on Africa. As a result, Dibua (2006) cites that even with a constituent level of GDP, the problem of underdevelopment is becoming more intractable.

The standard of living of majority of Africans remained unchanged and in some cases worsened. As discussed earlier, it is no wonder that African countries report high levels of growth and GDP per capita and yet possess the inability to achieve the more qualitative targets such as women empowerment and quality education. Therefore, the manner in which MDGs were set up and measured presents fundamental challenges to their achievement.

It is often argued that the implementation of the MDGs is not on track, and there is no significant progress made by African countries. Despite their challenges, Haines and Cassels (2004) believe that pursuing MDGs is worthwhile because through MDGs, government efforts are geared towards solving development challenges. According to these authors, MDGs also aid governments in assessing their plans, budgets and poverty reduction strategies and point out the need for urgent action by showing how far progress lags behind expectations.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

This paper commenced with a discussion of modernization theory and the link between development and economic growth. It maintained that MDG targets are measured using economic growth indicators. The paper highlighted the challenges encountered in using indicators such as GDP and GNP for measuring progress in development. It argued that despite having firm targets, deadlines and focused urgency, the MDG targets are imprecise and ineffective for development progress. It also argued that some of the targets are so immeasurable that it is difficult to see whether their desired trends of improvement are occurring. The paper indicated that there is a contradictory relationship between modernization and the indigent realities in African countries. The paper acknowledges that by replicating western institutions and experiences as the credible path to development, modernization detracts attention from the crucial roles of culture and the indigenous realities for the development process in developing countries.

This shortcoming adversely affects development projects including MDGs. The paper proceeded to argue that the current situation in Africa is that of irresponsible and incapable state authorities. There is rampant violence in which civilians are the most victims. Other challenges that affect the achievement of MDGs include mismanagement of funds, persistence of poverty trap and unhealthy reliance on foreign aid. The western architects of MDGs have failed to realize that African countries need more than 15 years, probably another decade to establish good governance structures, root out corruption and implement democratic, free market models.

These would subsequently help in reducing poverty, achieving universal primary education, gender parity, improving health outcomes and increasing participation in global partnership for development. Easterly (2008) maintains that in order to achieve MDGs, there is need for intense efforts by all parties including NGOs and the private sector to actively engage and empower civil society, promote entrepreneurship and the private sector as well as mobilize domestic resources.

Finally, it is necessary to note that substantial increase in aid must be accompanied by MDG based priority investments and global policy reforms including those in trade. Dowden (2008) reinforces the advantages of investment by African countries with an illustration of Nigeria and Indonesia. Both were oil producers which came from similar economic base and corrupt dictatorships.

When Suharto left power in 1998, the national output was $221 billion after an average 20 year growth rate of 7 per cent. Adult literacy in Indonesia was almost 90 percent and manufacturing represented 40 percent of exports. Nigeria on the other hand had an output of $33.4 billion after an average growth rate of 2.5 percent. Adult literacy in Nigeria stood at 60 percent and non-oil export was less than 5 percent.

The difference is that Indonesia invested in its people and resources. When developing national strategies for poverty reduction and sustainable growth, countries should bear in mind that initial factor endowments differ in each country. Also countries are at different stages of development thus, the development model of a copper rich country with maritime access like Chile should not be imposed on a landlocked country with limited natural resources and capital such as Laos (Roy & Heuty, 2005).

In conclusion, while there are numerous challenges to achieving the MDGs, the weight, importance and type of the challenges depend on the peculiarities of each country. Haines and Cassels (2004) acknowledged that the MDGs are ambitious and that Sub-Saharan African cannot achieve change by simply adopting goals and targets. In addition, the MDGs were set up in such a way that makes Africa very unlikely to achieve them compared to other regions (Easterly, 2008).

Africa's challenges to achieving MDGs have more to do with internal challenges such as poor governance and infrastructure than those relating to aid, debt relief and neoliberal policies. The challenge is that aid and debt relief are administered with conditions that many make countries unable access the funds they require thus limiting their achievement of the MDGs. Easterly (2008) asserts that the MDGs are unfair to Africa because all countries have been given the same targets and indicators bearing in mind that African countries started with very high poverty and low GDP rates compared to other more economically stable countries.

Countries are at different stages of development for example it would have been easy for a country like China to meet Goal no. 1 (reducing poverty) because they were already on their way to economic prosperity. On the other hand, it would be difficult for a country like Sierra Leone which is just recovering from a war that has devastated the country's economy and infrastructure to achieve goal no.1 even by 2025. This is also a challenge relating to the setting up of the MDGs without considering the different peculiarities of African countries.

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