

African Developments: Sub-Saharan Africa, too, Could Achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

2010 has been an important year for Africa. It marked the 50th anniversary of independence for 17 African countries and the 10th anniversary of the Millennium Declaration. It has also been around a decade since steps toward creating the AU and NEPAD were taken. In a series of DIE Briefing Papers, researchers from Europe and Africa look into African Developments a decade after the revival of the African Agenda to take stock and identify the challenges facing the continent in the years to come.

Summary

Ten years ago the United Nations (UN) set eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and 21 targets for tangible progress in poverty eradication, education, health, environmental protection and other areas between 1990 and 2015.

The regions of the world differ very widely in their progress towards achieving these goals: East Asia, Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe are well on the way to attaining at least half of them, whereas sub-Saharan Africa is likely to achieve, at best, three of the targets. This has already led many to ask what has caused Africa's "failure" and to claim that the MDGs were simply "too ambitious for Africa."

This view of sub-Saharan Africa as a whole overlooks the extremely wide variation of success in the achievement of the MDGs in this part of the world. Besides countries that have been able to attain virtually none of the MDGs, there are some that are very likely to meet at least half of the MDG targets on which any data at all are available.

For example, three countries in sub-Saharan Africa have already achieved MDG1 (halving the proportion of people on low incomes), and at least three others will do so by 2015. MDG2 (universal primary education) has already been almost achieved by seven countries, and they are likely to be joined by at least five others by 2015. And there are highly whole just as capable of achieving the MDGs. successful countries

in sub-Saharan Africa where other goals are concerned. They demonstrate that sub-Saharan Africa as a Growing attention to agricultural production and private sector issues provides a renewed stimulus for donors to improve the coherence of trade, aid, and private investment policies and to strengthen support for African-driven efforts to stimulate private sector development and increase the capacity to trade.

These countries are distinguished by six factors that may explain their above-average performance:

1. political and macroeconomic stability
2. good investment climate
3. a government capable of taking action
4. a political leadership with a vision, a strategy and the determination to pursue it in the long term
5. decentralisation and public participation in project planning and implementation
6. long-term, constant and predictable support from donors

On the other hand, neither the level of development aid received nor the starting conditions in the developing country concerned (such as income per capita and the primary school attendance rate in 1990, the reference year) appear to play a decisive role, and the influence of economic growth is also far less pronounced than might have been expected.

At global level few MDG targets are well on the way to being achieved

In September 2010 the United Nations again took stock of the progress made towards the achievement of the MDGs, which its members had set themselves in 2000 and supplemented at several subsequent conferences. The eight goals and 21 targets are to be achieved by 2015. For the achievement of MDG8 the development aid donors have been made responsible, while for MDG1 to 7 and their 15 targets (see Chart 1) the developing countries, assisted by the donors, are in charge.

The results of the stock-taking are very mixed. As things stand, only four of the 15 targets are expected to be reached globally by 2015 (halving the proportion of people living on low incomes, combating HIV/AIDS, combating malaria, expanding the access to drinking water), whereas nine are extremely unlikely to be achieved (productive employment for all, halving the proportion of the hungry, reducing the child and maternal mortality rates, possibility of contraception, access to HIV/AIDS treatment, preservation of biodiversity, ecological sustainability of policies, better living conditions in slums). Two targets (universal primary education, gender equality of opportunity) will be achieved only if very substantial additional efforts are made.

The results for sub-Saharan Africa as a whole are particularly poor ...

However, the results for the various regions of the world differ. East Asia, Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe, for example, are likely to achieve most of the targets by 2015, whereas sub-Saharan Africa as a whole will achieve three of them at most: equal educational opportunities for girls and boys, combating HIV/AIDS and combating malaria. Some authors conclude that the MDGs are "too ambitious for Africa" or even "unfair to Africa", since achieving them is particularly difficult for poor countries at a low level of human development, which is true of most sub-Saharan African countries.

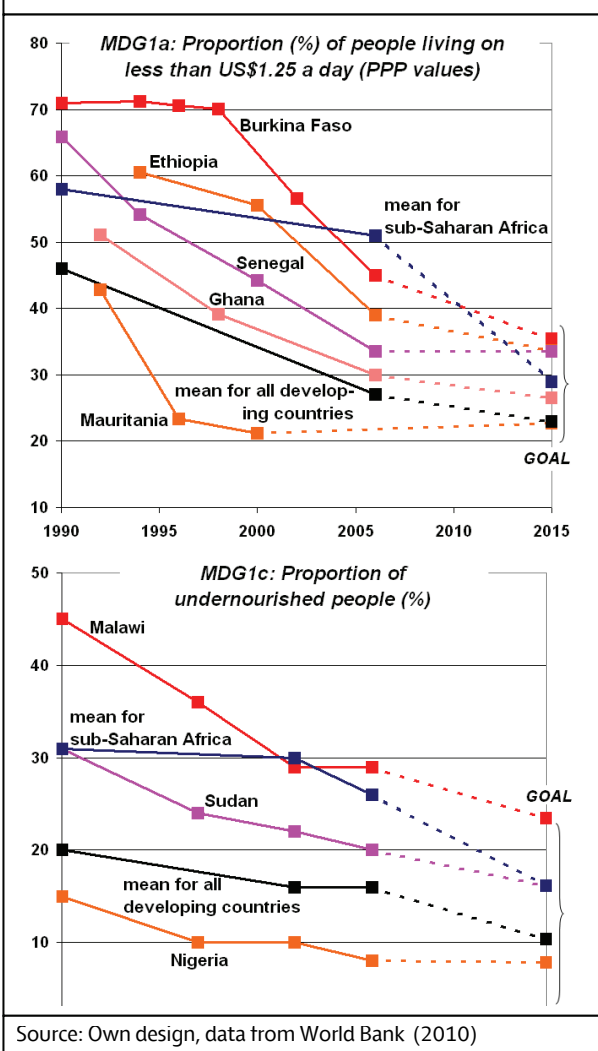
... yet sub-Saharan Africa, too, has many success stories to tell

The mistake that is often made in this context is to consider only aggregate figures for the whole region. They conceal the fact that sub-Saharan Africa consists of a wide range of countries, some of which will similarly achieve a majority of the MDGs, while others have so far made little progress towards achieving any of them. This range exists in almost all the world's regions. What is specific about sub-Saharan Africa is that the proportion of countries that have so far made wholly inadequate progress is particularly large. That is the only reason for the aggregate figures being worse than in other regions of the world.

After all, six of the 48 sub-Saharan African countries will in all probability achieve at least half of the MDG targets on which data are available: Ethiopia, Malawi, Namibia, Mauritius, Rwanda and Ghana (see Table 1). In other regions of the world the same is likely to be true of some 40 of a total of 97 developing countries. Twenty sub-Saharan African countries will achieve at least three of ten targets on which statistics are kept, and another nine will at least almost achieve them.

1a	Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people on low incomes
1b	Achieve productive and full employment and decent work for all
1c	Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger
2	Ensure that, by 2015, all children will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling
3	Eliminate gender disparity in all levels of education by 2015
4	Reduce by two thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the child mortality rate
5a	Reduce by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio
5b	Achieve, by 2015, universal access to reproductive health
6a	Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS
6b	Achieve, by 2010, universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS
6c	Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases
7a	Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and reverse the loss of environmental resources
7b	Reduce biodiversity loss
7c	Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation
7d	Have improved, by 2020, the lives of 100 million slum-dwellers
NB The donor countries are primarily responsible for the achievement of the 6 targets of MDG8.	
Source: The official list of MDGs at: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mdg/Host.aspx?Content=Indicators/OfficialList.htm (01.10.2010)	

Figure 1: Several sub-Saharan African countries are likely to achieve MDG1 on time



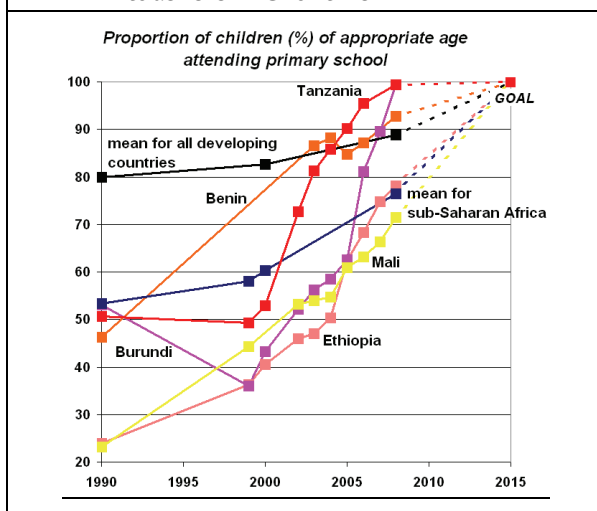
Source: Own design, data from World Bank (2010)

Table 2: Sub-Saharan African countries likely to achieve at least three MDG targets by 2015

Country	Number of targets which, by 2015, ... are likely to be achieved	may still be achievable	are hardly achievable	no meaningful data
Ethiopia	6	1	3	5
Malawi	6	0	4	5
Namibia	5	2	2	6
Mauritius	5	1	4	5
Rwanda	5	1	4	5
Ghana	5	0	5	5
Botswana	4	2	4	5
Cameroon	4	2	4	5
Mauritania	4	2	4	5
Uganda	4	2	4	5
Maldives	4	1	1	9
Burkina Faso	4	1	5	5
Mozambique	3	3	4	5
Angola	3	1	5	6
Lesotho	3	1	6	5
Mali	3	1	6	5
Chad	3	0	6	6
Gambia	3	0	6	6
Kenya	3	0	6	6
Benin	3	0	7	5

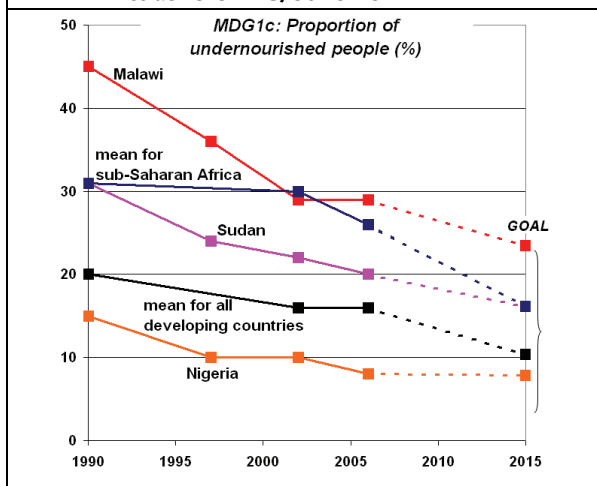
Source: Author's own calculations from World Bank (2010)

Figure 2: Several sub-Saharan African countries are likely to achieve MDG2 on time



Source: Own design, data from World Bank (2010)

Figure 3: Several sub-Saharan African countries are likely to achieve MDG7c on time



Source: Own design, data from World Bank (2010)

Ten years ago nearly all the sub-Saharan African countries had been left behind the rest of the world according to all indicators of human development, but a number of particularly successful countries in sub-Saharan Africa have meanwhile narrowed the gap considerably. At the same time, however, nearly all the MDG indicators show the disparities within the region to have grown.

It is not, then, the sub-Saharan African countries' destiny to fail to achieve the MDGs. It may be particularly difficult for them to achieve them on time, but in principle they, too, are capable of it. This is demonstrated by a number of African countries, by no means all of which have benefited from especially advantageous starting or development conditions.

For example, at least three sub-Saharan African countries have already achieved MDG1a (halving the proportion of people on low incomes): Angola, Botswana and Senegal. Two (Ethiopia and Ghana) have nearly achieved it, and three others are very likely to do so by 2015 (see Figure 1).

MDG1c (halving the proportion of people suffering from hunger) has already been achieved by Ghana and São Tomé e Príncipe and, according to official UN figures, 14 other sub-Saharan African countries will achieve it by 2015 (whereas 13 countries regressed in the case of this target between 1990 and 2006, and two others stagnated). However, the available UN figures do not yet reflect the effects of the 2007-2008 food crisis, which caused the numbers suffering from hunger to rise again nearly everywhere.

MDG2 (universal primary education) has already been almost achieved by Tanzania, Burundi, Madagascar, Uganda, São Tomé e Príncipe, Rwanda and Zambia: their primary school attendance rates are above 95 per cent. Furthermore, Mauritania, Malawi, Benin, Ethiopia and Mauritius are very likely to have at least almost achieved MDG2 by 2015 (see Figure 2). Some of these countries – Mauritius, for instance – already had very high primary school attendance rates in 1990. Others began from a very low level – the attendance rates in Mauritania and Ethiopia, for example, were 35 and 24 per cent, respectively – although MDG2 is especially challenging for underdeveloped countries. Conversely, the primary school attendance rate in Cape Verde and Botswana was already over 90 per cent in 1990 and has since declined.

And even MDG4 (reduction of child mortality), which may not be achieved by a single world region as a whole by 2015, can probably be achieved on time by five sub-Saharan African countries, four of which (Mozambique, Malawi, Ethiopia and Eritrea) began at an extremely high level of child mortality (more than 150 per 1000 live births).

What is decisive is the long-term commitment of the national governments and donors ...

This raises the question what characterises the sub-Saharan African countries that are being particularly successful in achieving the MDGs. A comparison with less

successful countries suggests that their above-average results may be due to six factors:

1. *At least a degree of political and macroeconomic stability:* Ghana, for example, is deriving considerable benefit from its stabilisation and structural adjustment measures.
2. *A good investment climate:* Of particular importance in this context are legal certainty and judicial and administrative transparency.
3. *The government's ability to act:* The most fragile states of sub-Saharan Africa will have achieved, on average, only half as many MDGs by 2015 as the least fragile.
4. *The government's willingness to act:* The political leaders have developed an unambiguous vision of the future of their country, geared to the common good, they are developing a specific strategy for achieving that vision, and they will pursue the strategy resolutely in the longer term. They also give absolute priority to government spending on human development. Ethiopia, for example, increased its expenditure on education from 7.5 per cent of the national budget in 1990 to 23.6 per cent in 2009, which, above all, enabled many new teachers to be recruited and school meals to be provided.
5. *Decentralisation of political decision-making and public participation in project planning and implementation:* By involving parents in the construction of primary schools, Ethiopia has ensured that they not only feel responsible for the development of their children's schools but also feel they have rights vis-à-vis teachers and school administrations and exercise them.
6. *Continuity in development cooperation:* The success of such countries as Ethiopia is, however, also due to the fact that the donor countries have been prepared to support and assist their development strategies financially and with advice in the longer term, giving them a high degree of planning security.

... whereas income per capita, growth rates and levels of development aid have little influence

Less important, on the other hand, is the volume of development assistance received. The sub-Saharan African countries that have been less successful in achieving the MDGs have, for example, received, on average, slightly more assistance than the successful countries. One reason for this is that donors often give a country strong support simply because it is having economic or administrative problems in achieving the MDGs. It is noticeable, however, that such countries as Ethiopia and Burkina Faso, which received, respectively, only US\$8 and 18 per inhabitant and year in development aid from 1990 to 2008, have been roughly as successful in achieving the MDGs as Namibia and Botswana, which received US\$51 and 46, respectively, in the same period.

It is also surprising that a country's wealth appears to have no influence on its success in achieving the MDGs. Thus the most successful sub-Saharan African countries include not only middle-income but also low-income countries (such as Malawi, Rwanda and Ethiopia).

And finally, economic growth similarly plays a far smaller role than expected. The average per capita growth of the ten countries most successful in achieving the MDGs was, at 1.9 per cent per year from 1990 to 2008, significantly higher than the mean for all sub-Saharan African countries, 1.1 per cent per year. However, these ten countries included, for example, Cameroon and Mauritania, with growth rates per inhabitant and year of 0.5 per cent and -0.5 per cent, respectively, whereas Equatorial Guinea grew at a rate of almost 15 per cent per inhabitant and year from 1990 to 2008, but is likely to achieve only MDG6a by 2015.

Literature

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