

# MDGs mount Pressure on both Developing and Developed Nations

By Douglas Ngwenya

The current global system is characterised by iniquities as evidenced by the fact that more than half of the world's population is wallowing in abject poverty. There are many reasons as to why the poor have remained in grinding poverty whilst the rich have grown stinking rich. The pointers place a heavy responsibility on the rich nations to assist the poor if they are to permanently exit from the daunting poverty within the next decade.

“The story of the poor goes round and round. But what about the story of the rich? The story not being told is that of the beneficiaries of slavery and colonialism. The story of exploitation that put us into this dispensation, commodified our own life for profit. They divided and ruled. Let us rise up and begin to tell this story... of why they continue to be rich, continue to plunder,” lamented Wahu Kaara from Kenya Debt Relief Network at the African Social Forum held in Lusaka in December 2004.<sup>1</sup>

“Africa is overpopulated. Africa has natural resources, particularly the Southern Shield - mineral resources. *We intend to take those resources. They're ours!* We cannot allow the Africans to eat them! We cannot allow so many Africans to live: They will eat resources that we want for our future. We cannot allow them to develop, because then they will use more natural resources, per capita. We can't allow that: *We must conduct population reduction against Africa! Sub-Saharan Africa.*”<sup>2</sup>

Henry Kissinger's statements bear testimony to Africa's impoverishment and the proliferating HIV/AIDS pandemic that is threatening to wipe the entire continent. These statements go a long way towards explaining why Africa has remained far from realising the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Africa's underdevelopment is rooted in the colonial history of slavery, colonialism and racism. However, it is of no use dwelling too much in the past that cannot be undone. The need to devote people's energies towards the creation of a prosperous future resulted in the enunciation of MDGs. The MDGs were enunciated at the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000. The summit brought together 189 world leaders who pledged to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability, and develop a global partnership for development by the year 2015.

The fulfillment of these goals by the set date will improve the living conditions of the poor and alleviate the plight of suffering masses. Unless these goals are realised, the rich nations and the rest of the world will remain insecure as noted by Dr Frederick Mutesa in his assessment of Zambia's prospects of realising MDGs by 2015.<sup>3</sup>

“The truth is that there can be no peace and stability in our world if poverty continues to hold the majority captive. Violence, epidemics and environmental degradation, are no respecters of social status or national boundaries.”

President Jacques Chirac of France also shared the same sentiments at the World Economic Forum on 26 January 2005.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pambazuka.org/07/01/05>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.larouchepub.com/lar/2005/3204berlin\\_seminar.html](http://www.larouchepub.com/lar/2005/3204berlin_seminar.html) 25/01/04

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.cspr.org.zm/Reports&Updates/MDGs\\_Critique\\_Dr.%20Mutesa.doc](http://www.cspr.org.zm/Reports&Updates/MDGs_Critique_Dr.%20Mutesa.doc) 20/01/05

“The youth of Africa, Asia and Latin America is rightly demanding its entitlement to a future. If this prospect is denied them, however, then let us beware of the risk of revolt. ... Development is both the greatest challenge and the most urgent issue of our time.”

The MDGs were embraced by both the developed and developing nations because they reflected a paradigm shift in the development discourse. The shift was from the usual emphasis on production, free trade, market driven economy and other abstract concepts, to a people oriented development that seeks to improve the quality of life of all the people in the world. The goals include halving the number of people who are living on less than 1 US dollar a day and reducing global hunger by half. According to the recent United Nations (UN) report that seeks to map out a strategy for the realisation of the MDGs by 2015, more than one billion of the six billion people on earth currently live below the poverty datum line. About 2.7 billion people live on less than 2 US dollars a day, whilst over 11 million children die each year from preventable diseases like malaria, diarrhea and pneumonia.

Africa is unlikely to attain the MDGs by the year 2015 unless aid to the region is significantly increased. Whilst attempts have been made to reduce poverty levels in Sub-Saharan Africa, the total number of poor people is set to rise from the 314 million figure of the year 2001 to 366 million in 2015.<sup>4</sup>

Another impediment to Africa's realisation of MDGs by the set year is economic instability, coupled with the continent's heavy dependency on commodity exports. The situation has been exacerbated by the World Trade Organisation's neo-liberal policies whose rules restrict the ability of developing countries to defend themselves against imports, which threaten domestic production while still allowing industrialized countries to protect and support their agricultural sectors. It is recommended that the developed nations open up their markets to developing nations, and lift subsidies to their farmers as they skew trade. Fair trade as opposed to free trade should take center stage.

A high death rate in Sub-Saharan African is another factor that causes the realisation of MDGs by 2015 to remain a pipe dream. HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis are wreaking havoc in the region. This has seen the life expectancy decline from 50 to about 46 years, and the figure is set to decline further. The high infant mortality rate, which is around 103 to 1000 live births has contributed to a decline in population. The realisation of MDGs by 2015 is not possible for Africa unless drastic measures are implemented immediately to curb high death rates.

Moreover, there is slow infrastructure development. Africa needs aid to improve its road and communications networks, ports and electricity in order to boost its competitiveness. Free primary school education, complemented by free meals at school will go a long way towards achieving universal primary education and drastically reducing poverty. However, African governments are not in a position to shoulder this burden without further impoverishing their citizens through heavy taxation. This therefore means that funding has to be sourced elsewhere, and donor aid seems to be the only viable option to address these needs outright.

In 1970, the United Nations General Assembly agreed that countries should set aside 0.7 percent of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for development assistance. Currently, only 5 countries have done so, namely, Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. Britain, Belgium, France, Finland, Ireland and Spain have promised to reach this target.<sup>5</sup> If all developed nations could affirm this agreement, Africa would be able to mobilise resources so that the MDGs become a

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.developmentgoals.org/Sub-Saharan\\_Africa.htm](http://www.developmentgoals.org/Sub-Saharan_Africa.htm) 30/01/05

<sup>5</sup> [ipsnews@ips.org](mailto:ipsnews@ips.org) 19/01/05

reality by 2015. Although the United States is the world's biggest economy, and also the biggest donor, its current assistance amounts to 0.15 percent of GDP<sup>6</sup>. This figure is far below the target of 0.7, thereby obligating America to emulate the European nations in its generosity.

The UN Millennium Project<sup>7</sup> recommends the following strategies to direct the developing nations towards the attainment of MDGs by 2015. The developing nations have to come up with "MDG-based poverty reduction strategies" by 2006. These strategies should "bold, needs-based, goal-orientated investment for the next ten years," and both donor and recipient nations should follow them. Countries already implementing Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) have been urged to revise and make them more ambitious to attain the goals.

According to the PRS watch (2005), the MDG-based poverty reduction strategy should provide a "framework for strengthening governance, especially public sector management, promoting human rights, engaging civil society, and promoting private sector."

The report also recommends close collaboration between civil society, domestic private sector and international partners to make the process more "transparent" and "inclusive." It is also recommended that certain countries be sped up and Official Development Assistance (ODA) be increased on the basis that they have "good governance" and "absorptive capacity."

There is also need for joint launching between developing and developed nations, for example, free distribution of malaria bed-nets and abolition of primary school fees.

It is therefore clear that unless a huge chunk of aid is churned to the developing world immediately, and that the developing world takes greater responsibility for effective and efficient use of resources to address the 8 MDGs, realisation of the goals will just be mere talk.

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<sup>6</sup> [ibid](#)

<sup>7</sup> [prswatch@host.netatlantic.com](mailto:prswatch@host.netatlantic.com) 18/01/05