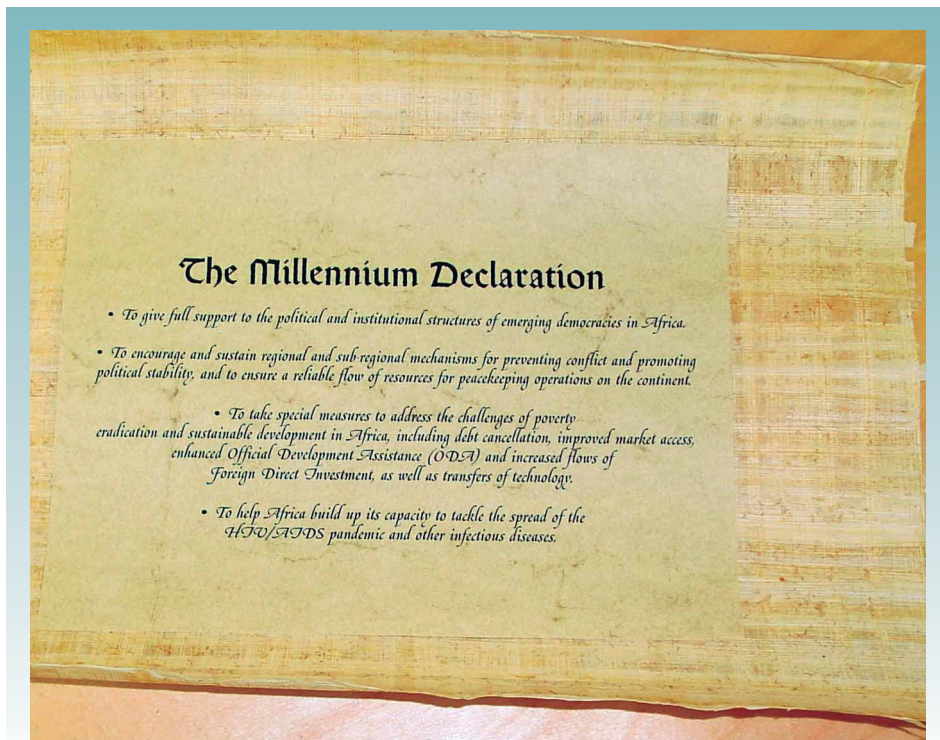


Africa's Development on the United Nations Agenda

By Yvette Stevens



Historical Context

The economic recovery and development of Africa was identified as one of the priorities of the United Nations since the 1980s. A number of initiatives were adopted by Africa and the international community to address African development, but these have not yet yielded the desired results.

A recent independent review of such initiatives that were taken in the 1990s revealed that they never became the framework for African development as they were expected

to be. Perhaps their most significant positive contribution was to help keep Africa on the international agenda, especially at the level of the United Nations General Assembly, and to institutionalize the notion that the continent's development rested on a series of partnerships. While the debate in the General Assembly had been intense, beyond the United Nations, few governments, whether African or donor, actually assumed ownership of the initiatives. Little attempt was made to translate them

into national policies. All those who had supported these initiatives failed to fulfill their responsibilities, and thereby failed to remove the many obstacles to development that plagued the continent.

From the recent review, a number of lessons could be drawn for future United Nations system engagement with Africa. These lessons:

1. The experience over the decade has shown that conflict and development are mortal enemies and that the resolution and prevention of conflicts in Africa are crucial to ensure development of the continent.
2. International development cooperation in support of Africa's accelerated development will need to be based on a major revision of the dominant thinking that had guided multilateral and bilateral programmes in Africa over the past two decades.
3. Commitments need to be met. It is essential that if the desired goals of initiatives are met, all actors should take steps to internalize them in their policies, strategies and actions to address the development of the continent.
4. There is a need for continued global advocacy for African development.
5. The United Nations system should pool its efforts and resources to give coordinated and comprehensive support to Africa.

The Millennium Development Goals

At the Millennium Summit in New York in 2000, world leaders identified global poverty as the most daunting of all the problems facing the world in the new century, and resolved to tackle it by creating “an environment - at the national and global levels alike - which is conducive to development and to the elimination of poverty”. In order to measure progress in addressing this problem, the Millennium Declaration included a number of time-bound targets, which were subsequently consolidated as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These goals, many of which had been adopted in various intergovernmental fora before 2000, cover a wide range of issues, including poverty and hunger, health, education, environmental sustainability and building a global partnership for development. The Millennium Development Goals have provided a common framework for global development, as they have been embraced by both developed and developing countries, multilateral institutions as well as civil society. The United Nations system has launched a Millennium Development Goals campaign to spread awareness and build global support for this program; instituted a process of national reporting on progress towards reaching the goals and, developed a Millennium Project which brings together hundreds of policy makers, practitioners and experts from a wide range of institutions and countries to determine how progress can be

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accelerated and sustained.

The Millennium Declaration singled out Africa for special attention. Section VII of the declaration makes an undertaking to support the consolidation of democracy in Africa and assist Africans in their struggle for lasting peace, poverty eradication and sustainable development, thereby bringing Africa into the mainstream of the world economy and member states resolved:

- To give full support to the political and institutional structures of emerging democracies in Africa.
- To encourage and sustain regional and sub-regional mechanisms for preventing conflict and promoting political stability, and to ensure a reliable flow of resources for peace-keeping operations on the continent.
- To take special measures to address the challenges of poverty eradication and sustainable development in Africa, including debt cancellation, improved market access, enhanced Official Development Assistance (ODA) and increased flows of Foreign Direct Investment, as well as transfers of technology.
- To help Africa build up its capacity to tackle the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other infectious diseases.

The Situation of Africa in Relation to the MDGs

In his report to the General Assembly in 2003, the Secretary General reviewed progress towards achieving the MDGs. The statistics showed that sub-Saharan Africa was faring badly

when compared to other regions of the world in all of the goals. Indeed, it was the only region in which the poverty and hunger targets had deteriorated rather than improved between 1990 and 1999/2000. For instance, the percentage population below US\$1 purchasing power parity per day had increased from 47.4 per cent in 1990 to 49 per cent in 1999. Other indicators show values for Sub-Saharan Africa to be significantly worse than those for the world or for all developing countries combined.

Link between peace and development in Africa

One of the reasons for the current situation in Africa is the incidence of armed conflict and insecurity in the region. Although the link between conflict and development was well known, it was not until 1998 that the report of the Secretary General on the *Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable and Sustainable Development in Africa* detailed the historical legacies; defined the internal and external factors and the economic motives that are the causes of conflict in Africa; outlined the implications of such conflict for African development; established concrete recommendations to address peacemaking, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance and, building durable peace and promoting economic growth. Since 1998, a number of United Nations actions in Africa have been in line with the recommendations of the report, although a lot still needs to be done.

Instability can be seen as both the cause and effect of poverty and underdevelopment. Civil conflicts result in high human, social and economic costs and are a major impediment to economic growth, without which development is inconceivable. Conflicts in Africa are largely intra-state and the causes of such conflict are complex and multiple. It is thus obvious that, in order to tackle the problem of poverty in Africa, significant efforts need to be made to resolve existing conflicts and mitigate new ones.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)

African leaders have taken the lead in articulating regional development initiatives. In July 2001, the African Heads of States, in their Summit in Lusaka decided that the Organization of African Unity will be replaced by the African Union, in a bid for greater economic, political and institutional integration of the continent. They also adopted the New African Initiative, later renamed the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), a continental initiative developed by African leaders. This initiative, which is centered on African ownership and partnership with the international community, is directed towards the achievement of the sustainable development of Africa in the twenty first century.

NEPAD was presented to the United Nations General Assembly in 2002. In the Declaration which followed the

plenary debate, widespread support for NEPAD was expressed and NEPAD was unanimously endorsed in a General Assembly resolution which stipulated that it should become the "framework for international community support to Africa."

There is a commitment in NEPAD to achieving several of the MDGs as this represents an important link with the United Nations Millennium Declaration. In addition, NEPAD fully reflects the priorities for meeting the special needs of Africa in the Millennium Declaration as outlined above.

The Road Ahead

From the above discussions it is obvious that the Millennium Declaration, the African Union Charter and NEPAD will form the basis for UN support to Africa in the foreseeable future. The "Road Map towards the implementation of the Millennium Declaration", which was presented to the United Nations General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session in 2001, outlined strategies to be adopted by the international community, including the United Nations, to assist Africa in moving forward. These were formulated under each goal stated above and briefly discussed below.

Strategies to support political and institutional structures of emerging democracies in Africa included support to the democracy and governance programmes of NEPAD, which includes targeted capacity building focused on public sector management, administrative and civil service

reform and strengthening parliamentary oversight, as well as encouraging governments to nurture democratic values, ideals and institutions to develop independent judiciaries and the media.

In order to encourage and sustain regional and sub-regional mechanisms for preventing conflict and promoting political stability, and to ensure a reliable flow of resources for peacekeeping operations on the continent, strategies include maintaining the engagement of the international community in peacekeeping in Africa; supporting peacekeeping in Africa through assistance to specific operations or through incremental steps to enhance peacekeeping operations generally in Africa; providing more funds to allow the African military officers, particularly those serving with the OAU and sub-regional organizations to participate in training and short-term exchange opportunities, and encouraging further cooperation by African States within the United Nations standby arrangements.

Additional Strategies

For special measures to address the challenges of poverty eradication and sustainable development in Africa, strategies include:

1. Helping Africa seek increased ODA flows and reforming ODA delivery systems to ensure that flows are more effectively utilized by African countries.
2. Supporting the establishment of measures that reduce risk in order to attract and sustain foreign direct

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investment and technology transfers.

3. Helping Africa to secure further debt relief.
4. Assistance with ensuring active participation in the world trading system through open and geographically diversified market access for its exports.
5. Helping the continent diversify its production and providing assistance to secure and stabilize preferential treatment by developed countries.

Strategies to help Africa build up its capacity to tackle the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other infectious diseases include:

1. Promoting global public goods for health by mobilizing commercial enterprises, especially pharmaceutical companies.
2. Giving high priority to measuring improvements in health in African countries, particularly the least developed countries.
3. Supporting capacity building in the least developed countries, to collect and analyze data on agreed health indicators and to share information at the regional and global levels.
4. Supporting African governments in their efforts to reduce death and disability from the major diseases affecting the poor, such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and other infectious diseases.

Under NEPAD, African leaders are taking ownership of their own development and are seeking partnerships with the international community. The United Nations system is tailoring its activities to provide support in the areas covered by the respective

mandates of the agencies. The Secretary General's report to the General Assembly on the Final Review and Appraisal of UN-NADAF, highlighted the modalities for the United Nations system support to NEPAD at the national, regional and global levels. These modalities of United Nations future engagement with NEPAD are based on the following premises:

- Promoting peace and development in Africa remains a priority of the United Nations;
- The primary responsibility for implementing NEPAD rests with Africa, its government and peoples. This is consistent with the principle of African ownership and leadership of NEPAD and one of the lessons learned from the UN-NADAF. The role of the United Nations is to support African efforts;
- The agencies and organizations of the United Nations system have accumulated tremendous experience in contributing to Africa's development, which they will bring to bear in supporting the implementation of NEPAD;
- NEPAD is an integrated framework that links the issues of peace and security with governance and development. As such, the United Nations system response to its implementation requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses peace and security, humanitarian, human rights, economic and social issues. The Millennium Development Goals provides the basis for the entire United Nations system to work coherently towards a common end.

Some Concluding Remarks

While a number of impressive developments that have the potential to improve the situation in Africa have recently emerged, it remains to be seen whether the means to translate plans and good intentions into action are forthcoming. At the International Conference on Financing for Development held in Monterey, Mexico in 2002, leaders from both developed and developing countries started to match the commitments on human rights, good governance and democracy with resources for development. The understanding that emerged was that sustained political and economic reforms by African countries would be matched by direct support from the developed world in the form of aid, trade, debt relief and investment.

One thing that is clear is that substantial financial support is required by African countries to enable them to reach the Millennium Development Goals or achieve the goals of NEPAD. In addition, success is required in the areas of conflict resolution and prevention. Furthermore, African countries need to put in place sound political and economic reforms that would lead to good governance. Indeed, data already suggests that unless significant progress is made in these areas, a large number of African countries are unlikely to meet these goals. There are also fears that the situation might worsen as a result of recent developments attracting world attention elsewhere.

The United Nations system will work with civil society and other stakeholders to support the implementation of NEPAD and the Millennium Development Goals through enhanced advocacy, undertaking technical cooperation for capacity building, mobilizing resources, monitoring and reporting on the activities undertaken by African countries and their development partners and strengthened cooperation.

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